

LENTEN SERMONS

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BY

DR. OSKAR PANK

PASTOR OF ST. THOMAS' CHURCH, LEIPSIC

TRANSLATED BY

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PHILADELPHIA

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MADE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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FOREWORD

Among the German preachers of the later nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Oscar Pank had few equals. From 1884 to 1912 he was associated with the St. Thomas' Church in Leipsic. As chief pastor of that church and superintendent of one of the Leipsic ephories, it was his custom to preach on festival days, and each second or third Sunday between festivals. When he was announced as preacher, the church was always crowded to the doors. In his audience there were certain to be representatives of all classes of society, wage-earners, members of the learned professions, officers of the garrison, professors and students of the university. His preaching attracted them all, because it had a message for all of them.

Those who remember him as he was at the height of his powers, between 1890 and 1905, think of him as tall and gray, with deep-set, flashing eyes, and a voice that, with its lightest tone, penetrated to the remotest corners of the great church. His first sentence would grip his audience, and attention never flagged a moment until the concluding Amen. One felt oneself in the presence of a commanding personality, who dominated his audience with a message that was compelling, because it was simple, heart-searching and direct. There was no striving after effect, no rhetorical artificiality, little literary embellishment, and yet, every sermon had

been prepared with the utmost care, and was a thoughtful exposition of some word of Scripture. So closely did the preacher stay within the thought of Scripture, that even his illustrations were drawn chiefly from the Bible.

The sermons contained in this volume have been taken from the volume published in 1910, under the title, *Ich shæme mich des Evangeliums nicht* ("I am not ashamed of the Gospel"). That word of Paul may well be thought of as the motto of this great preacher's life. Pastor Richards has done us a service, by making these sermons available to English readers.

CHARLES M. JACOBS.

Mount Airy, Philadelphia.

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LENTEN SERMONS

RELIGIOUS DOUBT OVERCOME

SUNDAY PRECEDING SEPTUAGESIMA

PSALM 73

"Surely God is good to Israel,
Even to such as are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet were almost gone;
My steps had well nigh slipped.
For I was envious at the arrogant,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.—Vs. 1-3.

* * * *

Nevertheless I am continually with Thee:
Thou hast holden my right hand.
Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but Thee?
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion
forever."—Vs. 23-26.

SUGGESTED HYMNS

God Moves in a Mysterious Way.
We are the Lord's: His All-sufficient Merit. V. 3f.
My God and Father, While I Stray.
Father, What'er of Earthly Bliss.
What Cheering Words Are These.
Commit Thou All Thy Griefs.

"Who can refrain from the conviction that the
Christianity of our day is not a joyful thing, but

an uncertain, anxious one?" So I read recently. It is truly so. To many the cause of this lies open to the day: doubts, religious doubts, gnaw at men's souls. They rise up on all sides, threaten and attack their spirits. Yes, there are many who are constantly in such trouble and turmoil.

It is some comfort, at least, to know that temptations of this kind have assailed men in all ages. We have before us a psalm which carries us back through many generations. It was written by a man who even then was beset so sorely, and so utterly depressed, that he says frankly: "My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." (V. 2.)

But he *did not* slip and fall. He wrestled with his gloomy doubts and rose victorious over them. Above his "well nigh slipped" there arises his doubly strong: "Nevertheless I am still with thee." That "nevertheless" is the prize of his wrestling; and when Luther places that same word in the opening line of this psalm, he rightly expresses the mind of the singer: "Nevertheless God is good to Israel." How often we meet that same holy, defiant "nevertheless" in the Scriptures. "Though the earth do change, and the mountains tremble with the swelling of the sea, (nevertheless) there is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46). And again: "Though he slay me, yet (nevertheless) will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). And note its repetition at the close of 2 Corinthians 6: "As sorrowful, yet (nevertheless) always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." These words "yet" and "nevertheless" vibrate still with those tempests of

the soul, above which they have risen, over which they have conquered: "And yet! Nevertheless!"

Especially is it wholesome for us, the children of modern times, to follow the logic of Asaph in this ancient psalm. It contains the noteworthy confessions of a soul assailed by religious doubts.

ASAPH IS ASSAILED BY RELIGIOUS DOUBTS

1. He confesses that these doubts have almost overcome him:

"My steps had well nigh slipped."

2. He shows us how he overcame these doubts:

"Nevertheless I am continually with Thee."

I.

"Well nigh," so Asaph confesses—doubt well nigh dragged him down, well nigh caused his faith to suffer shipwreck. But on what rocks and reefs? Let him speak for himself! Asaph had an attentive eye for the plaid web and woof of life, with its thousands of dark riddles, and the great question of an over-ruling God. Was there such a God? A divine hand, which actually governed all things, and shaped them with divine wisdom and love? But where shall we find these, when from the sunken eyes of the poor utter misery stares us in the face, or as in Southwest Africa peaceable farmers are murdered and hewn to pieces by human fiends, or yonder under the descending avalanche, or amid the crackling flames of a blazing house, or upon the war vessel with an exploding magazine, so many innocent human beings perish horribly? It is well known that the earthquake at Lisbon in 1755, when

60,000 persons were buried in a moment, stirred to its depths the youthful soul of a Goethe. This horror awakened all manner of questions in him, and disquieted him with his first religious doubts. He gave expression to these in the words: "God, the Creator and Preserver of Heaven and earth, who is represented as being so wise and good, has not shown Himself a father here, where the good meet the same fate as the bad; and my spirit seeks in vain to cast off this sad impression." And who has not felt the same way, and been assailed by similar doubts, until with Asaph his *feet were almost gone*?

And yet these are by no means the hardest and darkest riddles of life. It was harder for Asaph to behold and bear, harder for him to rhyme with the Eternal Holiness and Righteousness, that the wicked and vicious triumphed in the world and were prospering: "I was envious at the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (v. 3). They have more than heart could wish (v. 7). They are not in trouble as other men (v. 5)."

Oh! How many suffer under this Asaph-temptation in our days! That daily sight of the crying injustice in the apportioning of earthly goods and good fortune among men—how many are shaken in their faith because of this! This makes many a man say so confidently in his home-made wisdom that, "There is nothing in God and religion," that he for one will no longer heed such idle rumors! Is not what Asaph says literally true today: "They speak loftily" (v. 8). They play the wordy part of stage heroes, and leaders of the spirits of men: "They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walketh through the earth" (v. 9).

The psalm continues and says, that the people

run after them and catch the contagion of error, and doubt all that once was to them most holy and sure in religion and morals. So many a man does not merely "well nigh" but actually "slip."

But doubt may bore and gnaw even deeper than this. When we must weep Job's tears, because we are wounded where it hurts most; when men who are honest in their faith and earnest in their fear of God seem to find no help or faithfulness from God; when all their trust in God calls forth no response from Him; when our God seems deaf and dumb and our heart is assailed by a thousand dark thoughts and evil spirits; when blasphemous voices, like that of Job's own wife, bid us curse God and depart from Him—yes, then the troubled soul may well exclaim with Asaph:

"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocency;
For all the day long have I been plagued,
And chastened every morning." (V. 13f).

Or when we sigh and cry, not for any extraordinary help and gifts, but for the most pressing needs: for work and wages, for strength to bear our burdens, for light to choose between the evil and the good, and say yes or no; and these things seem to be denied us—how quickly then the firmest faith begins to shiver and shatter, and our *foot well nigh slip!*

Only he, who has lived through such experiences in life, can fully understand Asaph and his psalm. But he, who has so far escaped them, may fall into such trials soon enough. *Now* you have all your children; but what if you have to follow them one after the other to the grave! *Now* you have bread,

but what if some day you have none, and every door you knock at is bolted! *Now* you enjoy a reasonable measure of health and strength, but what if that counsel of Satan were allowed in your case: "Lord, put forth Thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh" (Job. 2:5)! *Now* you have your good name, but what if so much mud were flung at it, that your friends turn from you, and you can find no justice, let alone pity; and there is no arm of man or God to help you—surely then you would understand what it means to have your "foot well nigh slip," and understand it in all its frightfulness.

"Well nigh," says Asaph. Yet it *did not really happen*. On the contrary, it is most inspiring to see how Asaph sails past all these dangerous cliffs into a safe harbor; how this man, who confesses himself nearly swamped by religious doubts, nevertheless escapes being ship-wrecked in his faith.

II.

He beats back these waves of doubt with his firm and joyous: "*Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*" And in this too he has much to teach us. At first he "thought how he might know this" (v. 16), and tried to solve all these riddles; but "It was too painful for him," and he only cudgeled his brains in vain, "Until he *went into the sanctuary of God*" (v. 17). Of course the mere earthly sanctuary has no help for us, these church walls of brick and stone have no peace for a troubled heart. But what did Asaph find within this outward sanctuary?

First of all, he found there the worshipping congregation; that which Scripture calls the "*com-*

munion of the saints." My dear friends, there is uplifting and power already in coming into touch with the Christian congregation, the body of believers. The mere sight of them testifies that in spite of all doubts and attacks upon religion, there are hundreds and thousands who hold fast their most holy faith, a whole army of followers of the Christ who find Him their peace, a Church, built upon a Rock, against which the gates of Hell have not and never will prevail. That helps to stiffen and strengthen the reed shaken by the wind! That does far more to establish our souls, than all our vain efforts to solve these puzzles of life by our own painful thought and short-sighted understanding. Asaph "thought how he might know this, but it was too painful for him." With the dim rush-light of human wisdom no one can search the dark riddles of man's life, or throw light upon the deep mysteries of God. The ways of God would no longer be *God's ways*, if human wisdom could trace them out. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33f).

But come into the sanctuary of God and of His people! Mark how they have lived through all the ages, and impressed their life upon the world. All the power of men to go on loving and bearing our burdens has its deepest roots here, and its greatest victories too, so that all attempts to crush out faith and religion in men only react in new demonstrations of its undying Divine power. Asaph rightly says:

"If I had said, I will speak thus (like the wicked); Behold, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children." V. 15.

I am convinced, that many in our days, if they had more interest in the history of the faith in the past, and cultivated more sympathy with the confessors of this faith in the present, would be less like reeds shaken by the wind, and have more of Asaph's joyous faith and courage: "*Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*"

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God." What else did Asaph find there? Instead of his human ideas the *Word of God* and *His thoughts*! He indicates to what new thoughts he was lead by what he heard there out of the Divine Word. This lesson was impressed upon him first: If many a godless fellow has it better in the world than you, do not be deceived by outward appearances! His mouth is often big and loud, while his heart is shrunken and hollow. His outward life may seem boastful and prosperous, but all may be dry and desert within. And what of his end? "Surely thou settest them in slippery places!" (v. 18). The more luxuriant the grass, the nearer at hand the reaper's scythe. David saw the wicked man spreading like a green tree, and yet he withered away (Ps. 37: 35).

And on the other hand, when God's most faithful children must walk the Way of the Cross, and weep such bitter tears—what do we hear of them in the sanctuary! I will cite only one thing which Asaph, the much afflicted learned: "Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel" (v. 24). And when Thy love has planned, Thou wilt "afterward receive me to glory." "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth" (Heb. 12: 6). That word means "*educates.*" Therefore, when He takes me into His training school of trouble I should feel that He is lovingly con-

cerned about my soul, and I ought to kiss the hand that corrects me!

Tell me honestly; If God allowed every believer to have an easy life, if He answered their every prayer after their own desires, would not "all religion become simply a good business investment." How, in all common sense, is my love and trust to be tested and made true, if not in the fires of affliction, even as the mighty anchor is forged at a white heat, and the oaks root deeper after the storm! This is what we learn in the sanctuary of God: That God is as good to us in what He takes away, as in what He grants us; that He speeds us on our way by many a thing that seems to hinder us; that He loves us even when He chastens; and like a good physician sometimes wounds us for our healing. "Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel." Therefore, although floods of trial roll high, and body and soul seem ready to perish, "*nevertheless I am continually with thee.*"

Shall we take another look about the sanctuary? Then look into its holy of holies. Gaze there into the life of *our Lord and Saviour* and stand beneath His cross. Who loved God more than He did? And whom did God love more than His dear Son? And in spite of all this, behold the fearful fate which befell Him, and the horrid contrast between the sufferings of this Righteous One and the triumph of His mocking enemies! Indeed, here if any where, we might stumble at the Divine justice. But enter into that sanctuary of His death, and you will find it just what His whole life was: one great and heartfelt "*Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*"

"*Thou hast holden my right hand*" (v. 23), or

as Luther phrases it: "Thou hast holden me with thy right hand." Here we are looking into the very Sanctuary on High. There is a hand which holds me, and will not let me go, even when I am ready to let go, and lose hold of it. . . . A hand which held fast to fallen Peter, so that his faith failed not; and to troubled Job, so that he did not depart from God. Who has not felt the grasp of this hand? My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped, I had almost lost my hold on God; but Thou my God, *hast holden my hand with Thy hand*, which will not let go.

Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* pictures a fire on the hearth, to which no wood is added, and yet it never goes out . . . and why not? Because behind the wall there is an unseen hand, which pours oil into that fire! "It is of *Jehovah's lovingkindness* that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam. 3:22). This is our richest comfort in our times of trial and doubt; God will not quench the dimly burning wick (Isa. 1:31). And this is our safest refuge in such dark days: The God whom I may be ready to forsake, will not forsake me; I may be ready to let go, but He will not let me go; He holds me by the hand!

Dear friends, I do not know in what Asaph-hours many of you stand at present; and I do not know what trials like his await you. But I pray you may emerge from them all with Asaph's triumphant faith: "*Almost gone, well nigh slipped; and yet, Nevertheless still with Thee, because Thou hast holden me by the hand.*" Amen.

LET US RUN THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

I COR. 9: 24-27

"Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Awake, My Soul, Stretch every Nerve.
The Son of God Goes forth to War.
Take my Life, and let it Be. V. 2.
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. V. 1 and 4.
Draw Us to Thee, Lord Jesus.
Jesus, still Lead On.

To all who dwelt at Corinth these races and contests were familiar things. Who has not heard of the celebrated Isthmian Games, which brought all Greece streaming into Corinth every third year? Paul himself had learned to know them there, and they awakened stirring thoughts in the soul of this preacher of the Christ. You might have read these in his eyes, as he watched the strong men boxing and wrestling so desperately in the ring, or the glowing youths racing along the course to reach the goal; all fired with an ambition to win that

prize, which was the one thing most coveted in Greece, though only a wreath of pine awarded by the judge before an applauding nation. Long ago that Corinthian arena disappeared; but the memory of it still lives among us, and our young men have all heard in story and song of "The battles of brawn and brain on the Corinthian Isthmus uniting the tribes of the Greeks."

But there was a little group at Corinth at that time, who knew of *another* battle beside these; which they learned from that man with deep, earnest eyes, who had stood among them and preached. He reminded them of it again in this letter from a distance; and you may be sure, if they wearied of this nobler struggle, whenever they passed by that arena, the reminder of their great teacher would flash before their souls with its wholesome admonition and encouragement: "These contend for a corruptible crown; will you not struggle hard for an incorruptible one?" And what of us, beloved? How many in our day need the same warning, cheering words! Another verse (Heb. 12:1) bids us "Run with patience the *race* that is *set before us*." Paul himself takes the guidon in his hand, and sets the pace for us. Shall we lag behind?

But let us, as we consider our text, not trifle with classic words and thoughts. Let us rather direct the sharp edge of this Epistle against our hearts, with the question:

"Is our life the race and wrestling, which God sets before us?"

In our Epistle it is a two-edged question:

1. *After what are you running?* And if the goal is the proper one;
2. *Do you run aright?*

AFTER WHAT ARE YOU RUNNING?

I do not ask: "Are you running?" For that is not a pertinent question. We speak of the natural *course* of a man's life . . . a most significant word. We are all running; our life runs on swiftly; "it is soon gone and we fly away (Ps. 90: 10)." Longer and longer stretches the course behind us, and every day shortens the span between our hastening feet and the waiting grave. The Abc of all life's wisdom is that psalm verse (39: 4):

"Lord, make me to know mine *end*
And the *measure* of my days, what it is."

Child of man, do you not realize that your life has a goal and end, that you are running and racing toward it?

But to know this is not much. Our Epistle asks more: "After what, *toward what goal*, are you racing along? The "race of life"—that is the true picture of our times. On every side what competition, what jostling against others, until they are pushed out of the way, or trampled under foot, just as there at Corinth—and *for what prize*? For a crown of laurel? Such idealistic things have no charm for our age. Men want something more "material," more "real" in our days. Shining gold is what one races after, or "real" estate; and another after the pleasures of life, higher or lower; and a third whose thoughts are more elevated seeks civic honor or martial glory; and some modest soul wants above all a carefree existence. The race after these things fills the whole life of many a man and takes all his time and strength!

"Real," he calls them, and is unconscious of the

irony in the word. For is that real, which when a man has it, he sighs and says: "It is nothing!" It gives him no peace; it has no power to make him happy? Is that real which may be taken from me any moment? Over which is written both: "Vanity of vanities;" and "The world passeth away and the lusts thereof?" The pleasure seeker, grown old before his time, who wishes he could recall his wasted life; the once celebrated actor or artist, now withered herself, who gazes at her faded laurels with dull listless eyes; the miser, who gloats for the last time over the blinding figures of his gold in his last will and testament; the man who was so prominent, whose titles are rehearsed in the announcement of his death, or proclaimed by the decorations upon his coffin—what else do they declare to us, but the shattering truth of a *race run in vain!* A corruptible crown!

Yet we would not be unreasonable. There are many, thank God, whose course of life aims at higher and better things, at ideal goods and values. They devote all their powers to their calling, strive to render the most service, to raise the intellectual standards of others, to further the common weal. This is certainly a noble effort, a worthy course. And yet, only too often he who runs thus is disillusioned. Run hard as he may, others receive the recognition, and he is thrust back. Or his powers of body and mind give out, and he is laid on the shelf in a short while. Yes, how many after the race of life must sigh regretfully: "I have only run in vain. My life seems useless. What have I accomplished?" But must this always be true? Was there *no other goal* for such a fruitless life, one which it could never fail of reaching under any

circumstances? Yes, there is a prize, which the fallen, the lame, and the sick can win! A goal which the cross-bearer reaches more swiftly, than the sound and the happy! A victory waiting for him who seeks it, even when all earthly palms are denied him! A wreath which the Heavenly Judge will award his warriors when their good fight is fought and their Christian race is ended!

Hear what the apostle says: "They do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we *an incorruptible*." Here our Christian religion rises above every atheistic and rationalistic view of life. These know only of victor prizes on earth; and if these are wanting, they think they have run in vain. According to their views the bankrupt counts his whole life a failure, and in their poor logic makes an end of his wasted life. But for the Christian life can never lose its worth, no matter how short he falls of these earthly goals, and how hard his lot may be. Life is still worth while for him, because it reaches out through time into eternity. He knows of an "eternal life," and bears a bit of it already in his heart as the "earnest of the Spirit (II Cor. 1:22)." He knows that this is the pledge of a thousand-fold more awaiting him in the perfect life. Yea, the harder he must wrestle here, the louder sounds the call: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward (Rom. 8:18)." Therefore, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life"—a crown in which every drop of sweat here shall become a pearl, and all his tears shall turn to rare jewels.

Again, tell me what you are running after? And if you know of this incorruptible crown, are you *racing* for it? In Corinth there were benches for the tribunes, who loudly cheered and applauded the runners, but never moved a foot themselves. I fear that is the way with many today. They sit in the church-pews, and show their approval of each strong appeal to run the race; they hear gladly of each saint and martyr who has held out bravely in the hard strife, until his dying hand has grasped the prize; they love to greet those, who at their confirmation set out on this race, with cries of, "Run well! Fight the good fight of faith!" We are all in danger of becoming merely those who look on and urge others and because of fact count ourselves in among the runners and wrestlers. I feel myself in such danger; and what Paul feared for himself I fear too, that, "*when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.*"

There is another danger we must recall. Many have made a fine beginning in the race, but fare like those Galatians to whom Paul must write those bitter words: "*Ye were running well; who hindered you? (5:7).*" And who hath hindered you, young man, young woman, and caused you to fall out of this holy race, out of this good fight? Alas! Those who hinder you, will not help you later, when your life has been wrecked and ruined. Push them out of the way! Seek those who will help and not hinder! Harken to the cries of the holy victors. Perhaps among them is your father, your mother, wife, or child; there is a whole "cloud of witnesses" upon the tribunes' benches with palms of victory in their hands; and upon "the throne of His glory" sits One, who holds "in his right hand seven stars,"

and calls out to them that are His: "Be thou *faithful unto death*, and I will give thee the *crown of life*" (Rev. 1: 16 and 2: 10).

So once again, I ask *what* you are *running after*, and whether you are *running aright*? Mere running at random will not avail; "So run that ye may attain." That is our second earnest question:

DO YOU RUN ARIGHT?

Running aright—we grasp this at once—means running toward the *right goal*. And here, my friends, let us make a distinction. To receive the crown of victory which the judge awarded was one thing; to reach the appointed goal set for the runner was quite another thing. And just so it is for us. First the goal, then the crown! But what goal? What is the real end and object of the life and course of an earnest Christian? It can be none other, than such a communion with God, and to reach this, such living fellowship with Christ in this life, as will develop of itself into an indissoluble communion with Him in the life eternal. It must be this: That I may so lay hold upon Christ, and be so laid hold of by him (Phil. 3: 12), that He may live and rule in me; His mind becomes more and more my mind, so that with Him I hate all sin and forsake it instead of forsaking God; but love Him as Christ did, even unto death; love and forgive my fellowmen with Him, heal and help, strive on and suffer, until with Him I may commend my soul at last into my Father's hands. That was the goal of a Paul: I count all things to be loss and dross for the knowledge of the Christ (Phil. 3: 8). That was the right way he ran: "I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for

which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus;" "I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (V. 13).

And now let us look at the details of running aright. First of all, it must mean "running *in the race*," staying in the *course appointed* and marked out. A Christian knows this course: "I am the way" (John 14:6). If you would run aright, pay heed to the footsteps of the Christ you find in the way before you. The course is bounded by His words and commands. Men try to break through them today, as if they were uncomfortable bounds, whether they pick and hammer at the limits set on the one side by the State and the law, or on the other by marriage and chastity. Yet these holy bounds stand unmoved, and never leave those unscarred who dash against them. May the Lord keep us in His paths, and suffer not our feet to slip from them. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you . . . so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). Follow these directions, and you will keep the right course. Although unbridled license may beckon you to the one side, and tempting voices lure you to un-Evangelical by-paths on the other, answer both alike: "I will abide in Him."

Listen again to our apostolic leader: "Every man that striveth in the games exerciseth *self-control in all things*." Paul recalls the hard training (ten months), with which the Greek contestants steeled their bodies for the strife. He followed them in this, and allowed nothing to hinder his apostolic course. For this reason he never married, earned his living with his own hands while he preached, and became so accustomed to hard-

ships, that he writes: "I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want" (Phil. 4: 12). And here in our text he says: "*I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage.*" He does not wish to bind us by his own example; for not all men can or should deny themselves so utterly for the Gospel. He repeatedly says that such sacrifices are not expected from us. But each one of us is to deny himself those things which hinder and cripple *his own* Christian life. What these are each must learn from his own experience. Some can allow themselves things, which would be rank poison for another's faith and life. But here that solemn saying of Jesus applies: "If thine eye causeth thee to stumble," tempts thee to sin, "pluck it out, and cast it from thee" (Matt. 18: 9).

Again Paul says: "*I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.*" He does not follow today Christ the sun, and tomorrow some other guiding star; does not make for the great goal one day, and the next wonder whether it is the right goal and worth the seeking. This "running uncertainly" is another danger of our times, and especially for our immature youth. The unripe are drawn to faith on the one side, and dragged into doubt on the other; until they lose their firm stride and steadfast gaze toward the goal. To such limping runners the Scripture cries out: "Be not carried away by divers and strange teachings: for it is good that the heart be established by grace" (Heb. 13: 9).

"So fight I, as *not beating the air.*" That is mere fanning the air, when many in their zeal swing the sword against this one and that thing, and never against—their own breasts! We land

such blows in the air, when we pretend to be so strict with that old man in us, but furnish him with food and weapons in secret; when we march out boastfully against him, but forget what a master he is in dodging. Then we fight without landing any blows, or hit out without doing him any harm.

I hear a sigh from some honest soul, and I join in it. The more a man is in earnest about the race set before him, the more the thought of the little progress he has made troubles him, and the question: "How can I go forward better?" How can we surmount all these obstacles, and *find rest*? I do not mean that *false forgetful rest* with which many are satisfied; but that deepest rest brought to us by the promise: "*Faithful is he that calleth you*" (I Thess. 5:24). He, who calls me into this conflict, will also help me. When I stumble, yea, fall in the race, He will forgive, and lift me up. Many a person has learned to run aright, only after such a painful fall. When I grow weary in the course, and my knees tremble, He giveth strength to the weak, and sends times of refreshing. He helps our souls cast off many a thing that hinders their race; yea, cuts these away with the knife of His providences. He takes from us many things, that we may hold fast the "One thing needful." Thus He directs our eyes to the goal, and opens our ears for His: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Day by day Jesus Christ thus becomes for us *all in all*: the *goal*, the *way* to the goal, and *help* along that way. "Draw us to Thee, Lord Jesus." "Jesus, still lead on, till our rest be won." "Guide us by Thy hand to our Fatherland." And may our life's course have this

blessed end: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." Amen.

TWO WHO THIRST

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

JOHN 4: 5-19

"So he cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph: and Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. . . . Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said unto him, I have no husband. Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts. V. 3.
Thou Hidden Love of God, Whose Height. V. 3.
God Calling yet!—shall I not hear? V. 4f.
There is a Fountain Filled with Blood.
The Spirit in Our Hearts.
As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams. V. 2f.
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say. V. 2.
Art thou Weary, Art thou Languid?

This dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a pearl set in John's golden Gospel. It

begins with the request of our thirsting Lord: "Give me to drink." But as the story goes on their positions are reversed; the woman becomes the thirsty one, and Jesus draws for her the Water of Life.

TWO WHO ARE ATHIRST

So the narrative closes, which we have before us today: *Two* are athirst; and God grant that in this hour a *third* may be added to them: this or that soul among us, who renews the plea, or for the first time learns to beseech: "Lord, give me Thy Living Water!"

THE FIRST THIRSTY ONE

is *Jesus*. Weary from His long journey, He reaches Jacob's well near Sychar, and sits down to rest upon its ancient curbing. His disciples are sent into the nearby village for provisions. The Oriental sun shines down hot upon His head. But here comes a woman, with a pitcher and long cord, to draw water. One glance at the man by the well tells her that He is a stranger, a Jewish teacher; and so the Samaritan approaches him without any greeting and ignores Him. But Jesus addresses her, and begs: "Give me to drink."

This leaf out of our Saviour's life is most touching, and the reason for this is easily recognized. It pictures Him as so close to us, so human. We feel how true the apostle's phrase is: "Being found in fashion as a man" (Phil. 2: 8). Like any other man He felt and experienced, lived through and suffered under, tasted and contended with hunger and thirst, tears and pain; grew tired, and for sheer weariness fell asleep on the hard boards of a fish-

ing boat, and here he sits down on the well-curb to rest His tired limbs, and thirsts.

In this there is a bit of sweetest comfort for us. When *we* experience these burdens of life, and sigh to God beneath them, we have One there above, who knows how a child of man fares and feels here on earth. The Epistle to the Hebrews (4:15) says: "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been *in all points tempted like as we are.*" He knows how we feel, who have come here today, it may be fresh from that experience of the Sixth Psalm:

"I am weary with my groaning;
Every night I make my bed to swim;
I water my couch with my tears." (V. 6).

The fever patient parched with thirst, tossing throughout the lonely night; the overburdened wife and mother, whose strength gives out, so that she can scarcely stand any longer—all these may look to Him, and find comfort in the remembrance of His thirst here by the well and there on the cross, and of His weariness as He walked the hard ways of our life.

But meanwhile these thoughts lead us only to the well-curb of our narrative. To draw out of the well itself, we must reach down deeper into the story. This is true, first of all, with respect to our *thirsting Lord*. While He entreats the woman: "Give me to drink," there stirs in His soul a different and a deeper thirst. *He thirsts* to make *her* thirst! This is revealed as the dialogue goes on. That was a curt reply she gave Him at first: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman?" She could not re-

sist the temptation to taunt Him: "Just see what a little thirst can do with a proud Jew, who otherwise would have nothing to do with a Samaritan! How friendly it suddenly makes him!" And how does He reply? In words of such seriousness, that at once we feel how they spring from a great thirst in His soul: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and he would have given thee *living water*." And from this point, each word which follows manifests His longing to awaken a spiritual thirst in this woman's soul, to reach her soul, and to save it.

Two things are made plain to us here. One is the *worth* of a *human soul* in our Lord's eyes, even though it be a most degraded soul. Picture to yourself the kind of woman He was dealing with. She may have had some little mental grace, but for all that she was thoroughly superficial, trifling, and empty. And if only this had been all! Every woman has been given one special bit or armor to defend her against sin. It is her natural sensitiveness, her inborn modesty and shame before anything that is coarse and vile. And when a woman has lost this, she is a "lost woman." And that was what had happened to this woman. She has to bow her head beneath the rebuke: "Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." That tells us enough, and most of us would not have wasted a word upon such a woman. When the disciples returned, they might have said in our Lord's own words: "Cast not your pearls before swine!" He could not even have justified Himself by referring to the woman, who was a sinner, for she, deeply as she may have fallen, knelt

in penitence at our Saviour's feet, and her silent tears were an eloquent plea for forgiveness. But this woman was a glaring contrast to her; here was saucy assurance, deliberate turning aside of all serious and higher thoughts. Yet Jesus engages busily in conversation with such an one!

A proof is here, so some one tried to tell me recently—of how mild and indulgent our Saviour was toward such offenses, and of how differently He judged the Samaritan from the stern condemnation of many today. He was in earnest in his view of this story; but I must confess, I never dreamed our Saviour could be so utterly misunderstood! Yet it chimes in with the views one meets in many quarters, where love for the sinner is confused with lax views about such a sin; and men blindly think our Lord sanctions loose morals, simply because He calls the immoral to repentance and a better life. Can any one who reads the words of Jesus here, carry away the impression, that He condoned the sin of this woman, and meant to sooth her conscience? No! The thing that overwhelmed and changed her was the deep and holy earnestness with which He uncovered her sin, and aroused her dull conscience. It was clearly His intention to awaken in her the consciousness of guilt, to make sin *sin* for her, and thus to save the sinner— and with this intent His love seeks the last trampled remnants of the image of God in such a soul, seeks the last sparks of the Divine fire in that heap of ashes, in the hope of fanning them into a flame, and redeeming a human life from death. It is in this, above all, that the real greatness of our *soul-seeking Saviour* appears, and calls loudly to us all: "Follow Me!"

The Church of Jesus Christ follows Him in the pastoral care by its ministers, who must keep Jacob's well before their eyes when they plead with straying souls. Again we follow Him in our Inner Mission works of love, as we seek to reclaim the most degraded, and go after those whom we would otherwise avoid. We know of no deeper joy, than when we can extend a helping hand to some poor child or man lying in the abyss; when we live to see some soul, which men thought hopelessly lost, snatched as a brand from the burning by the Saviour's mighty hand. But it is painful to consider how few among the thousands of disciples of Jesus in any great city feel anything of His love which sought the lost! And how many might have been held back from the way of destruction, if only the right lips had spoken to them at the right time, as Jesus did here to the Samaritan! Yes, how many an apparently hopeless case might yet be saved!

Of course, a man can erase the last vestige of the image of God in himself, so that the Divine will to save is rendered powerless, because it finds in that man no longer a point of contact. For a Judas even that last pleading question was in vain: "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? It simply rebounded from his heart which was so hardened in evil.

This is the first thing which touches us in our thirsting Saviour: His estimate of the value of a human soul, even when fallen so low. And the second is the *way He deals with* such a soul in order to rescue it, the *holy art* of His pastoral care, as He makes use of the simplest external thing, like a drink of water, to lead the conversation to the

deepest spiritual needs. Every evasion of the woman, and even her mocking words He turns into new thorns to thrust into her heart, until she feels at last what manner of woman she is, and is led to that point where all soul-salvation must begin: the shame and horror of sin, and the longing for One who can redeem her from it. We learn to know our Lord in many places as a masterly Shepherd and Bishop of souls, but those who would learn from Him the care of souls will find this conversation with the Samaritan the finest model for such activity. Not that we are always to follow the same plan; for our Lord dealt differently with each soul He sought! For example, what a contrast this is to the talk He had with the scribe Nicodemus by night! The great point here is the fervent love which persistently seeks the souls of others; and the goal it keeps in mind is the knowledge of sin, and the thirsting for peace with God, for Him who redeems us from the misery of sin. In a sermon by the Chief Court-preacher Koegel upon this passage, he says: "Of all the laurels which the kindly but poor critics now accord the pastor, and then deny him, only one amounts to anything in the sight of God: That two-fold thanksgiving; 'Man of God, you were the first to show me what my sin is, and what my Saviour is; you have saved my soul!'"

THE OTHER THIRSTY ONE

is the Samaritan woman. I am mindful first, in this connection, of her *past*. Then she *thirsted* as a worldling, impatient of restraint, for good days, happiness, and love, no matter from what impure spring these were drawn, and drank her fill of

them. But *was* she really satisfied and happy? She wore the outward appearance of it. Her saucy defiance, her sarcastic wit left the impression, that all things in her life suited her, and there were no barren and blasted spots within, but only comfort and contentment. She busies herself indeed to create such an impression.

But he who knows a little about souls, knows only too well, how apt and skilled men are, when things are not right within, when the soul wears a scar, to hide this with a gay and cheerful mien, and make believe that peace dwells in their breasts.

The more entangled a man is in the bonds of sin, the more he feels the need of putting on a bold, self-satisfied front. That is the most fatal art of falsehood, and so fatal because the man for a time at least believes his own lie, and tries to believe in it more and more, and thus becomes more deeply snared in the entangling net, more blind in his unbelief, and goes farther down hill on the broad way to destruction.

And the hall-mark of this sort of soul is always that sarcastic laughter and trifling of the Samaritan woman. Indeed, is not the distinctive mark of our time this smirking and mocking front, behind which is hidden only spiritual bankruptcy? And another common trait is brought out in this story. The Samaritan, as soon as she sees this believing, thoughtful Jew concludes that he is puffed up with pride. How often we observe this very tendency in careless worldlings: to them all Christians, who are in earnest about sound faith and good morals, only seem proud and critical judges.

All this is true enough, but the seemingly contented state of the Samaritan can not deceive our

Saviour. His eyes pierce her storm-tossed breast. *Sin never makes any one happy*—and why not?

Because one thing in man can never be slain and silenced: *his conscience*. Though beaten and bruised a hundred times, it still lives on, hammers away within, and finally breaks forth into loud outcries. So it was with the Samaritan woman, when our Lord demanded of her suddenly: "Go, call thy husband." That was like the thrust of a lance into a festering wound. She winces, and turns pale. But she still tries to hold herself together and face the matter through with her half-true and half-lying explanation: "I have no husband." Then the Lord strips off the last cloak from the filth and shame of her life, and under this unsparing revelation, she breaks down, and awe fills her soul: "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet!"

Dear friends, we have lived to see the like of this often! The heart entangled in sin resists the voice of conscience, and for a time all warning and conscience-awakening voices are in vain, until in one way or another the scales fall from the eyes, and there is a horrid awakening with terror in the soul. Generally this does not happen, until God Himself halts the sinner by some unexpected providence, or the consequences of his sin sweep like a flood over the man, and the whole crumbling structure of his folly and pretence collapses, and he looks with horror upon the misery of his ruined life, into the abyss of his guilt, and then he learns to *thirst*, yes, to thirst for *one drop* of comforting, soul-refreshing water.

Many among us have been set thinking, by these thoughts, of a familiar national figure. I am not responsible for that. It is not an artificial flower

of fancy, but the ugly fact of an unmasked adultress, which stands before the eyes of our people today in the churches of our land, and reminds us that this chapter in John is not simply an account of the past, but something constantly repeated with shattering reality in the history of mankind. Who is not struck by the similarity in their features—that woman of the past, and this of today—light and trifling, toying with sin shamelessly, boldly defiant in her sin; and yet, down in her heart—how could it be otherwise—deeply unhappy! Will the resemblance be continued? Will her conscience awaken again, horror-stricken at what she has become, shivering with penitent sorrow? Or will she go on in her accursed way to a still more fearful end? Will some one, filled with the Spirit of Jesus come to her, and speak with her as Jesus did with the Samaritan to save her lost soul? We can only entreat God in silent prayer, that *His* voice may find and reach her, that Jesus may meet her and make a *thirsting* soul of her, thirsting for His saving forgiveness and His power to redeem her from her chains.

Three things I hear in His stern message: First, the fearful earnestness of *sin*, and its inevitable *curse*. They take a frightful responsibility upon themselves, who in their teachings and writings defy the moral law and stride over the bounds which God has fixed, preaching a free love and unbridled lust, and helping the devil drag souls down into hell. That is a righteous indignation, which an earnest Italian expressed some decades ago against certain books, plays, etc., in which, "Passion is pictured before our people as unconquerable, and guilt as a charming or at least a necessary thing,

and virtue is trampled in the dust, and its very existence doubted." And yet somewhere we have read, and we second the words, that immoral times like these do this much good at least; they show what *can not still* the thirst in the souls of men, but only ruins them in body and soul. At this rate such times have some value; they help us value that monumental word of Holy Writ: "Sin is a reproach (ruin) to any people" (Prov. 14:34). This is the first great, earnest thing of which the Lord speaks to us.

The second is the fearful earnestness of the *conscience*. Men can smile at it, laugh at it, oppose it, tramp it under foot, but — not trample it to pieces. It is a holy thing, that in the end will avenge such insults. And when it finally rises up, in spite of being crushed to earth, and its very countenance strikes terror into the sinner, and furies follow in its train, then we come to the third thing!

Yes, then the world has no sedative, no curative medicine. That is the end, and there are either despairing cries and desperate steps, or there is *the one Way of Salvation*, the fleeing to Him whose arms were opened wide on the cross for the most utterly lost sinner who repents; who has the only water to refresh a perishing soul, balm for the burning wound, hands to lift us up, and power for new and better lives. If our day doubts, with the Samaritan: "Art thou greater than our fathers, or more than the great spirits of our times?" even in this our day the very happenings we observe will supply the answer anew: "Yes, He is more than they all. God has given Him a name which is above every name. His name is "Jesus," that is Saviour,

Redeemer, Benefactor. He alone dare declare to mankind: "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!*" (John 7:37).

"Beloved, how shall we take leave of this text? Let each one earnestly examine *his* heart, and see whether it is thirsting after those things which never quench but only aggravate our thirst. Let each one of us pay heed to the Lord as He stands beside *us*, warning, seeking, drawing us to Himself. Let each of us pray more earnestly: "Lord, do Thou give me to drink!" Amen.

"BEHOLD, WE GO UP TO JERUSALEM"

QUINQUAGESIMA

LUKE 18: 31-43

"And He took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill Him: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said. And it came to pass, as He drew nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the wayside begging: and hearing a multitude going by, he inquired what this meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they that went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God."

"Thy Holy Passion, Lord now doth us move
To sink ourselves in Thy most Holy Love." Amen.

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Jesus, still Lead On.
O Christ, Our True and Only Light.
Through Good Report and Evil, Lord.
O Love that wilt not let me Go.
The Son of God Goes forth to War.

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem." It is not long ago that we saw Him go up for the first time to the Holy City, as the twelve-year-old lad full of eager anticipation, attending the Passover with His parents. Again He goes to the Passover; but what different sensations are in His soul, what gloomy suspense, as He says: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem!" It is for the last time.

Notice one thing here. He does not say: "I go up;" but: "*We* go up." It is a quiet demand that His disciples should go *with Him*. And it did not remain without a response then, for soon after Thomas says in a burst of inspiration: "Let us also go that we may die with him" (John 9:16). That saying ought to appeal to us especially who are assembled in this church, and who bear his name as a congregation. Do we not feel the eyes of our Lord, resting upon us as He goes to the Cross, and silently asking: "Is it only Thomas' name I find here, or also his mind and very heart?" What answer, beloved, do you propose to make to Him?

He already has the answer from our lips: "Let us walk with Jesus now, and learn from His example how." May this hymn be our watchword in the opening of the Lenten Season!

OUR ANSWER TO JESUS' CALL: BEHOLD, WE GO UP
TO JERUSALEM

1. *Let us walk with Jesus now,*
2. *And learn from His example how!*

1. *Let us walk with Jesus now!*

He is not in doubt about *whither* He is going and what fate confronts Him. Long indeed had He worried about the souls of this people, among whom He dwelt. Plainer and clearer to him be-

came the certainty, that all His labor was in vain. The hearts of this people became continually a harder soil, their leaders more fanatical, and His own fate shapes itself more distinctly: to be cast into the abyss of hatred He saw opening before Him. He can and will no longer conceal this from His trusty Twelve. So He quietly takes them aside, and unfolds before them this picture of His approaching future: "The Son of man shall be delivered up to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill Him." It is almost uncanny, that our Lord should see before Him so clearly every station of His Way to the Cross, on even to its awful close: "And *kill him.*" Whence comes this presentiment of Jesus, which to one who goes deeper into the story appears more than a mere *presentiment*? It is Divine knowledge, not mere feeling and fear.

But another question forces itself more insistently upon us. If He foresees all this coming, so surely, so awfully—why does He not seek to escape it, or even shrink from it? Why this striding boldly down into the yawning abyss, this marching into the open jaws of death, unconcerned though fully warned? Yes, why? He Himself answered this question repeatedly: "It *must* be;" It behooved the Christ, He *must* needs suffer these things (Luke 24:26). Oh! That dark, mysterious "Must."

It was a must which arose from man's *sin*. All that is holy and Divine is naturally to the children of sin an object of dislike, a hated thing; and the more perfect it is, the more positively it confronts us, the stronger our dislike, the more bitter our

hatred. All darkness hates the light. Therefore the prophets *must* needs be persecuted and stoned in stiff-necked Jerusalem; John the Baptist *must* go to prison; Jesus *must* go to the Cross.

And yet—is this the whole meaning of Jesus' saying: "That thus it must be (Matth. 26:54)." Is He not pointing to a higher must, when He expressly says: "All things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man?" He sees them as things written in the great book of the *Counsels of God*. If God permits this horrid and awful thing, it happens not by accident, not by the arbitrary will of man, but according to *His fatherly will*. It is the plan for our redemption, which confronts Him and us here, in all its depths. "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" He who knew no sin, was made sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). Our fine old hymn runs: "Go forth, My Son!" He said, "and bail the children who are doomed to hell but for Thine intercession."

And the son makes answer:

"Yea, Father, this shall be My part;
Lay on and I will bear it.
Thy Law is written in My heart,
Thy love shall be My spirit!"

Of course He dreads such a task. We see Him later in the garden surrounded by the horror of sin's night, and hear Him pray the Father to spare Him this cup. But even then, He knows what the answer will be and anticipates, "That thus it *must* be." He rises from His knees, firmly resolved: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." "The cup which *My Father hath given Me*, shall I not drink it? (John 18:11)." Thus He sees no

longer the bitter cup, but the hand of His Father, who gives it to Him; and He grasps this hand. Thus according to the Father's will, under the Father's eyes, and hand in hand with the Father, He is ready to walk this hard way—this way He *must* walk, this way He wills to walk. For Him the constraint has become one of hallowed obedience, a must of attentive love.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)." "I lay down my life. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself (10:17)." Thus voluntarily facing defeat He had already won in truth the victory; thus dying from the serpent's sting, He crushed the serpent's head; and by His dying love He rules the world which put Him to death.

One side of His love shines out today especially. Our Epistle speaks of "love not being easily provoked." Now we all know how easily bitter complaints are called forth from our love, when its warmth is chilled by cold ingratitude, and how soon it is "done with" those upon whom our efforts to help are lavished in vain. And when our own great sorrows engage us, how little heart we have for the needs and sorrows of others. But how different our Lord Jesus! The striking and touching thing in His Passion History is how His love, instead of withdrawing from the sorrow of others, enlarges itself just then, and makes a greater surrender. As the time grows shorter for Him, His heart and hand become the busier in love; His own necessity impels Him only to speed up His benefactions to others. Heroic about the sufferings of His own body, He becomes the tender healer for the

bodies of others. With one hand He grasps the hand of the Father, but the other hand is freely extended in blessings to men.

This the blind man by the wayside experiences. You would think our Lord, filled with a thousand troubled thoughts in this crisis, would have no time or disposition to stop and deal with a blind street beggar. The multitude going before Him feel how burdensome such an interruption is, and "rebuke him, that he should hold his peace." Not so Jesus! It was an unthinkable thing for His heart to say: "Let him keep on calling; you have enough to do with yourself." No! He stops at the blind man's cry, and asks lovingly: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" He already knew his needs, but asked the question to awaken trusting faith in the poor man. And after that He did for him according to his faith; and among them that followed the Lord with humble gratitude in those days, there was henceforth one more: the blind Bartimeus now doubly restored to sight: in body and in soul.

Dear friends, shall we not also join this procession? That is the call and meaning of the Lenten Season. It demands of us all, that we accompany our Saviour upon the Way of His Passion, at least in spirit, and so make good the saying of Thomas: "Let us also go with Him!" There is no more engrossing portion of the New Testament story than these pages, which picture the suffering Jesus. He who reads them thoughtfully will feel their quiet blessing. Nowhere do we draw so near to the Lord, as on His way to the cross; and nowhere do we learn to look so deeply into His heart, or into our own, as beneath His Cross. Nothing brings peace so truly to all who dwell in the home,

as when this thorn-crowned One walks through those rooms as our "Unseen Guest." Martin Luther, whose death-day was February 18th says: "My way of fasting in Lent is to read what the Evangelists have written about our Lord's Passion." And Melanchthon, whose birthday was the sixteenth of February, wrote a fine prayer-verse in Latin, which declares: "There is nothing I love more, than to weep and suffer with Jesus, and to accompany Him in all the Way of the Cross."

But the New Testament makes a greater demand upon us, than this of walking *with* Jesus: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should *follow his steps* (I Peter 2:21)." Let us walk with Jesus, but also walk in His footsteps.

II. AND LEARN FROM HIS EXAMPLE HOW

We too wear the yoke of that stern must of suffering. It is in part a necessary consequence of our contact with the *forces ruling nature*. Some of these are destructive forces, yet these too belong to the Divine order of this world, created and willed of God. In the very water which makes field and forest fruitful, lies latent a devastating power to sweep away men and their houses. The air which all the living breathe, brings us also the germs of disease.

Beside this there is another must of suffering, which grows out of *sin*, out of our own sins, or the sins of others against us. And we all know how bitter this is.

But far above this must of suffering stands another and a nobler must: that upon which the Lord fixed his eyes so firmly; the must inscribed in the Book of God's Counsels; the thoughts of God to-

ward us, which even when we suffer are "thoughts of peace and not of evil" (Jer. 29:11).

I anticipate the doubting, yea mocking, rejoinder: "How can there be any Divine thoughts of peace and man's salvation behind suffering? Can they be found back of the heart-rending misery of Messina, its earthquake and volcanic eruption? Would you insist, even in that there is the hand of a wise and loving God?" We can understand the doubt and difficulty which such a question brings to man's inmost soul. But is it the first time one, who deals with the dark mysteries of life, has met this question? At Messina there are a thousand sufferers grouped together *in one scene* before our eyes. But are there not many thousands every day in this great world of ours, who fall a prey to death? Gather them all *into one picture*, and the question becomes a thousand-fold more puzzling: "Why must there be such endless suffering on earth?" Neither is this a new question, confronting for the first time the children of today; but it has troubled mankind ever since men have suffered, and among these pious and perplexed sufferers we find an Asaph and a Job. But all this could not slay their trust in God, neither does it today shake our belief, that suffering must be, but behind it always stand God's thoughts. Higher than ours as the heavens are above the earth, are the Divine Counsels for our salvation.

If ever there was a thing to stagger our faith in God, it was the Cross, where the purest and holiest of men died, amid excruciating torture, apparently forsaken by men and God. And yet, what deep thoughts of God ordered all here; and what a wonderful salvation for all mankind has grown

out of it! The catastrophe down there at Messina called forth deep sympathy in a hundred thousand hearts, set whole armies of helping human hands in motion, and awakened the fine traits of chivalrous courage, democratic sympathy, and unselfish sacrifice; are not these a blessed saving grace, arising Phoenix-like out of these ruins? And is not the same true of all the suffering and struggle in our life? Without such wrestling in common against the evils and hardships of this world, there could be no cultural and moral development of man. The noblest virtues: enduring courage, mutual helpfulness, patience, and self-surrender, are born out of suffering, exercised and tempered by it. Above all the religious forces, such as a man's faith—how can they arise and grow strong, test and attest themselves, except in this stern school of suffering?

Therefore, if we are plunged into suffering, may we never forget its holy purpose, never fail to see behind it God's counsels of salvation. Some of these we often apprehend; and if they are hidden from our eyes, remember Christ's saying: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter (John 13:7)." Under all trials let us abide in the footsteps of our Saviour; grasp as He did *the Father's hand*; trust firmly His good and gracious will; and be obedient to the *hallowed must* of His love and wisdom. When a man stretches out his arms, for help or in help to others about him, he forms the figure of the cross. And we Christians have the habit of calling our trials "crosses." It is a fine name, for it bids us look up from them to the great cross-bearer, and calls forth the silent vow: "We follow Thee."

Such cross-bearers will cultivate that other trait in His example. Their crosses will not make them selfish, narrow, or hardened. On the contrary it will widen, soften, and enrich them *in love*! That is a twice-told tale of misery, when a *man* becomes bitter in his suffering, and also lets it embitter him toward others. Is this the example Jesus set us in the way of His Passion? But the tale is twice beautiful, when a man bears his own cross with strong and steadfast soul, and through his own troubles gains an open eye and a tender heart for the crosses and burdens of others. All such warm love under our crosses is a picture of the great cross-bearer, a living Epistle and Gospel. Precious it is when these two grow together: affliction and affection (*Leiden und Lieben*)! So let us follow His example! One hand, the hand of *faith* and *obedience*, in the hand of the *Father*; the other, the hand of *love*, extended to help and *bless our brethren*! Then we shall fulfill the Saviour's word and wish: "Behold, *we* got up to Jerusalem."

But now follows a most earnest question: "Can we follow our Lord thus?" Of course, we know the limitations of our poor powers; if our following of Him depended upon them, we would soon fall by the way. But, God be praised, we have a Saviour, who not only cries: "I go before you;" but also calls: "I will walk by your side, and help you." That is the great difference between Him, and other great examples. They may inspire us to follow them, but give us no strength for this. But out of Him proceeds virtue, a *Divine power*, and especially from His Cross. Ask the best and noblest Christians, where they have learned these things; obedience and love, strength for suffering and for

sympathy. They will point you to Him who passed through Jericho on His way to the Cross, the Jesus of Nazareth who is always passing by in the Passion Season, within sight and reach of us.

Shall we not be beggars by this wayside, and cry to Him from the depths of our hearts: "Have mercy on me?" And when He asks us so earnestly: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" then tell Him what thou lackest, where it is hard to walk in His footsteps. Tell Him your troubles, and He will show Himself your physician, heal and help, and take you with Him on the way.

In many places the special Lenten hymn of the Christian congregation is: "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us!" This Sunday is called "*Esto Mihi*," from the psalm-verse: "Be Thou *my* strong Rock: for an house of defence to *save me*." "*Esto Mihi*," be this to me, help me walk with Thee, and in Thy footsteps. Save me in my last passion, when my heart is most afraid. Let me then, like blind Bartimeus, hear Thy firm footsteps, feel Thy helping hand, and hear at last Thy blessed voice, saying: "Behold, *we* go up now together to the Jerusalem that is above!" Amen.

INDIFFERENCE AND FRIVOLITY

FOR A PENITENTIAL DAY IN THE PASSION SEASON

JOHN 18: 3f

"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?"

LUKE 23: 6-12

"But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And when he knew that he was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him unto Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem in these days. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad: for he was of a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard much concerning him; and he hoped to see some miracle done by him. And he questioned him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes stood, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers set him at nought, and mocked him, and arraying him in gorgeous apparel sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

O Jesus, King most Wonderful. V. 2.

Hail Thou one Despised Jesus.

O Christ, Our True and Only Light. Vs. 2 and 5.

Holy Spirit, Lord of Light. V. 3f.

Jesus, and shall it ever Be. V. 3.

"Whence come these sorrows? Why art Thou afflicted?
For me, a sinner, Lord, Thou art convicted:
All Thou endurest—Victim, for me offered—
I should have suffered."

We stand in a solemn season of the Church Year. It is dominated by one thought: The Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world, goes His way to die. The solemnity of this thought has been expressed in each Sunday's lessons; and in their services the Hallelujah has been hushed, and the more joyful music of the church silenced. But shall it appear only from our services, and not from our lives also, that Jesus goes to His death? Ought we not heed the more readily in this silent season the bells calling us to penitence? And what is more fitting to awaken thoughts of penitence, and to deepen these, than the remembrance of the Man of the Passion.

He repeatedly calls His Passion a "cup," which He must drink. In Gethsemane He wrestles in the struggle of His soul against this bitter cup, until at last He triumphs in obedience. He takes the cup from His Father's hand: (John 18: 11), "The cup, which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it."

"Given" to Him by the Father's hand; of this He is sure. But it was "filled" for Him to the brim by a thousand sinful human hands. Yes, in reality, it was one cup after another, which they filled and compelled Him to drink. There was the cup of fanatical hatred, which the High Priests and scribes poured out; another of the blackest ingratitude, which the people filled for Him; again, the cup of Judas' betrayal; that of Peter's denial, and that of His fleeing and deserting disciples. And were these all? No! In our text we have another, which the two chief political rulers in this Passion History, *Pilate*, the Roman governor, and *Herod*, the Jewish king, hand Him once and again. Both give Him a bitter cup to drink. How shall we describe it? It

is not the fanatical hatred of the priestly rulers, not the base ingratitude of the people, or the treachery of the disciples. It is merely—*indifference*. Yes, "Merely;" but have you not experienced how under some circumstances indifference can taste more obnoxious and more unbearably bitter, than open hatred and treachery? What hatred pours into our cup may burn; what ingratitude adds may be bitter; but what indifference makes us swallow—is the term too strong, when we say that its cup is revolting? We must not overlook the fact, that this repulsive cup of utter indifference was forced upon our Lord; and what we read about it leads us to many an earnest thought.

THE PART INDIFFERENCE PLAYS IN OUR SAVIOUR'S PASSION-CUP

stands with its warning before us, as it appears in two-fold form of

1. Pilate's indifference, and of
2. Herod's frivolity.

I.

Without contradiction, one of the climaxes in the great Passion drama comes, when the proud Roman governor puts the question to the accused man before him: "Art thou a king then?" and this man makes the royal response: "Thou sayest (truly) that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice!" That ends in fearless challenge: "Who is of the truth? Are you, proud Roman, a man of truth?" There was a

moment of hushed suspense on the judicial bench, and then with a careless, "What is truth?" Pilate stalks away to join the Jews outside whom he pretends to befriend, but really hates and fears.

What do these few words mean? Is it indifferent *mockery*? That would contradict the whole behaviour of this prominent man, and all his former attitude toward Jesus. Pilate has never a bit of mockery for Jesus. He mocks at the Jews; but at Jesus? Never!

After the manner of the Spartans (Lacones) this laconic reply: "What is truth?" expresses much in few words. Does it hide a secret *searching* after the truth? There were at that time many Romans who sought painfully after truth. Earnest philosophers busied themselves with the serious problems of life. Others felt themselves drawn toward the solid religious content of Judaism, the true religion as personified in Jesus. I need only remind you of the centurion Cornelius, who sought after God; or of the centurion of Capernaum, who came to the Christ. But if Pilate had been a seeker after the truth, would he have turned his back upon it in that moment, when his search might have found an answer from the King of Truth?

But if Pilate is neither mocking, nor seeking, what manner of soul hides behind these words of his? It is the soul's attitude of the overwhelming majority of the educated men of that day, which flashes out in these three short words. They had broken with the old religions; but what had all their great thinkers brought them instead? Why, one brought them this as the truth, and the other that; one school waged a feud against the other; and what was the result? Men naturally asked: "Is

there any truth? What is the truth?" A weary scepticism, which doubted all things and simply refused to believe any, rested like a ban upon their spirits, and made Pilate speak thus.

Besides this, the material interests of life so burdened men then, that they thought it fruitless, foolish, to overheat themselves about ideals, and especially about the religious questions which soared aloft in the clouds. All that men had left for these was the very opposite of interest: an utter lack of all interest, as little interest in one view as the other, pure *indifference*. What really interested Pilate was: to safeguard in every way his well paid position, to compromise with these crazy Jews as best he could, and to have no bad reports reach the emperor about him. "That," thought Pilate, "is *my* truth." In short his inquiry: "What is truth?" was no inquiry at all. He waited for no answer! The reply of *Pilate* to the Christ, who gazed at *him* so earnestly, questioned him so deeply, and knocked so lovingly at his heart, was the sorry answer (and how full it filled the cup of His Passion): "Don't bother me with your 'truth'; I refuse to bother myself about that!"

This question of Pilate is nearly two thousand years old. Yet it sounds like a remark from a business circle of the immediate present. It is the standpoint, to which much of our modern culture has come. In many of the men of our day—and who can ignore them — religious faith is simply shattered. The chief cause for this is the view, that our faith can not be reconciled with the latest results of science; and there are no lack of unruly spirits, who busy themselves in attacks upon Christianity under this kind of a barrage. How hopeless

such attempts will prove in the end appears from that saying of the Christ: On whomsoever this Stone shall fall, it will scatter him as dust (Luke 20:18), Not the Stone will break, but what He falls upon in judgment will be ground into powder. It is clear, that there can be no contradiction between the final results of science and the actual content of Christian faith; for from both of them the same truth of God speaks to us. Yet I can understand with hearty sympathy how earnest spirits may be tormented with many a gnawing doubt by apparent conflicts.

But here begins a separation among the spirits of men. The apparent conflict will drive some to seek the more earnestly for the truth; and, thank God, their number is ever increasing, for whom the question is: "What is truth?" and who ask this with honest seeking, and struggling to find it. Oh! I hear these three words loudly or quietly reverberating in a thousand hearts, not as an empty phrase, but as the expression of an earnestness, which would "dig the truth out of the depths of the earth, if it is to be found there." Who would not show respect to such seekers after God and His Truth? In them I am sure the Proverb (2:4f) will be verified, that if a man seek Divine wisdom and truth, as men search for silver and hidden treasures, he shall find it. That honest longing for the truth is sure to find its way at last to the King of Truth: "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."

But very differently will they fare, who welcome the objections to the truth, because of their dislike for the truth; and who therefore do not think it worth while to busy themselves with Jesus and

religious questions. Such may cry: "What is the use? One confession reads thus, and the other otherwise; one theology holds this, and the other something different. Which is right? Where does the truth lie?" And the trouble with such is, that all their interest lies along other lines, and is claimed by things which promise them larger material gains. This is why they are blase, indolent, *indifferent* toward the highest questions of life. Like Pilate they may be well-bred enough not to make fun of the truth, but also think themselves too cultured to take notice of it; too indolent to be enemies of the Lord Jesus, but also too little interested to be His friends. The King of Truth stands before them, gazes at them, addresses them, knocks at their hearts, but they only reply: "Don't bother me with your truth. I refuse to bother myself about that!"

Let no one underestimate the *consequences* of such indifferences. These are embodied in this warning figure of Pilate. In him there may have been much that was worthy and honorable. His sense of justice rebels against the condemnation of Jesus. He recognized the innocence of this Man, was deeply impressed by Him, and sought one means after another to release Him. But in this very Pilate we see, how the man who has no firm religious hold soon loses the hold which morals ought to have upon him. Where no Divine Truth lives and reigns in a man, there right living and doing will soon die out. This is the striking lesson we learn from this Roman gentleman; he who turns his back on the right faith, soon turns it also upon a good conscience. He, who is indifferent when the truth speaks to him from the Lord Jesus, stands

indifferently by when this truth and Jesus is crucified! Remember, that it was not the hatred of the Jews which decided our Lord's fate, but the *indifference* of Pilate. His name is branded for all time, he is forever blamed for the crucifixion of our Lord. Wherever men repeat our ancient confession of faith, as they say the Creed in any language of Christendom, this Pilate is pilloried: "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." The Son of God and King of Truth was put to death under this weak, indifferent ruler.

That same accursed fruit is always ripening on this tree of indifference! I recall serious experiences of this in our *national* life, when our Empire suffered sadly, because of the indolence of many toward their duty, and their refusal to stand personally for the best interests of the Fatherland. These luke-warm, loose, and indifferent adaphorists brought about a compromise which threatened the nation's death in the near future.

And the same indifference in *religious* matters is no different, but even more serious. Can any man think it an indifferent matter, that he should be indifferent toward the Highest and Holiest? That attitude will decide the whole relation of the man toward the Divine Truth; that unbelief becomes his faith! When the Eternal no longer lays down laws for his inner life, mere worldly opportunities for gain or pleasure will soon rule him. When a man is indifferent to the majesty of God, he will soon lose all respect for the majesty of conscience. Can it remain an indifferent matter for our people, when as in Pilate's day whole groups of the educated are indifferent to the Church and Christian religion? They are loading upon themselves

a weighty responsibility. They may not feel any enmity toward Christendom, but they do not lift a finger for the Christ, or speak one good word for Him, although His enemies rage more and more wildly against Him, and shriek more loudly their: "Crucify Him." What are such, but *modern Pilates*, who deliver the truth to be crucified!

And with the truth the conscience of those who betray it goes to the cross. The higher strata of society may be held back from gross immorality by their traditions and culture, and thus the final consequences of their religious indifference be postponed; but the rest of society will jump to logical conclusions of such indolence. For them no God, no clear revelation from Him, will mean no conscience and no morals. Why should any one else prescribe what they may do and must let alone? To whom in the world do they owe any obedience, if it be a world without any God? To these conclusions the anarchist has already come in *his own* way, but all those atheists share his guilt, who with Pilate in the high places of life wash their hands of the Christ. The *indifferent* in religion crucify and murder, bomb and burn side by side with the hangman and the anarchist!

God be praised, that in recent times whole circles have awakened from their national indifference, and a new movement wends its hopeful way through the national domain. When will the same awakening come in the religious sphere? I lay this question particularly upon all *Evangelical* consciences. Our Catholic population stands already *as one man* for what *they* deem holy. Where is that same spirit among us for the most precious treasures won by the Reformation? Do our people propose to give

them up? Then our Church will hasten to a fall, brough about not by the enemies of the Reformation, but by its indifferent friends and contemptible confessors! An earnest French Protestant says of such religious indifference: "It is a dead sea, in which nothing can live; a wilderness, where nothing grows; it is the *most immoral crime* of our age!" And from Holy Scripture rings out the stern accusation of Jesus against His Laodicean followers: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth (Rev. 3: 15f)." *Repent* of all indifference therefore diligently, for He stands at the door and knocks, and His sword is drawn!

But what we have heard is not the end of the part which indifference plays in the Passion History of our Lord. Pilate's ear has caught the word, "Galilee." He learns that Jesus is a Galilæan, and at once the idea comes to him, that this Jesus belongs to the jurisdiction of King Herod. And how fortunate it is that Herod is in Jerusalem just at this time! Only too gladly does he turn over Jesus and this whole distasteful business to Herod, and thus show some respect to one with whom he had before been none too friendly.

II.

So Jesus stands before *Herod*. If Pilate, as an adiaphorist, wore the negative character of indifference, Herod advances a step farther into the disgusting character of *frivolity*. This rouses our resentment so strongly, that we need few words to describe it.

Herod, the son of the notorious child-murderer, was that adulterer into whose teeth John the Baptist hurled his, "It is not lawful." According to his name a Jew, he was none the less a heathen of the basest kind, a worldling and lustful man, and what often is combined with this, given to such refined cruelty, as the head of poor John on a platter in his dining hall exemplifies.

Herod "was exceeding glad" to see Jesus. He expected no little pleasure in learning to know Jesus, and promised himself an interesting hour of unusual entertainment. There was not the least trace in this king of any serious interest, much less of a religious one. He was *so utterly indifferent*, that anything really religious simply *amused* him. He "hoped to see some miracle done" by this famous worker of wonders, but in this he deceived himself. When he found Jesus would show him no magic, he tried to draw Jesus out by all manner of questions. And what kind of questions were these? Such, that the Bible narrator deemed them unworthy of record, and our Lord unworthy of an answer! They were beneath his dignity, and "He answered him nothing."

This *silence* is the more *significant*, because of the earnest words He had addressed to Pilate. There had been something in him, which moved Jesus to speak, but before Herod's indifference, which has degenerated into mere frivolity, Jesus is silent. And what an ominous silence that is! There is a most terrible eloquence in it, for where Jesus keeps silent, judgment must be already on the way! The High Priests and scribes, encouraged by such an unheard of behaviour, redouble their accusations against Jesus. But He pays no attention to this,

and only continues in His utter and awful silence. And now Herod expresses his merry indifference toward Jesus by having Him arrayed in "gorgeous apparel," and in this sport the whole court takes part. But mark you! It is a kingly robe they put upon Him, when they would make a fool of Him. They have no presentiment of the great truth, that *He*, and not Herod, is *the Great King*, and in bright, or *white* and *shining* garments (see the angel Acts 10: 30).

Does Jesus not stand just so before the Herodians of our times? Indeed the manifest resemblance to this Herod, which we find in the faces of our generation, must terrify us! We need only mention the phrases: the unrestrained enjoyment of life, materialistic views, loose notions of what is good and evil, free love, unbridled lust, adultery and divorce. This utter indifference to all that is holy ripens into frivolous books that would have delighted this Herod, and cheap wit after his own style; pictures, posters, and dancers who might have stepped out of Herod's own banquet hall. And does it not belong to this downright frivolity, when men ridicule and laugh at the representatives of religion as though they were fools (note the lean and long-faced figures with high hats and white ties in comic pictures); when religious acts are presented only as aesthetic tableaux and pageants (mock and Tom Thumb marriages); and when smart questions are raised only to cast contempt upon religion, and set the audience laughing. Idle questions are asked today, before which a disciple of Jesus who would hallow the name of God, can only remain silent. Our Lord Himself bade us: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs" (Matth. 7: 6).

And it does not make it easier for the followers of Jesus, much less for the King of Truth and Purity, to drink such a disgusting Passion-cup, when it has been filled by those who once in their baptism were called by His name. What will the end be, if we keep on educating our people, and our young men and women, to be courtiers of Herod instead of followers of the Son of God? If we continue as a people in the way a Pilate walked, and a Herod, and the whole Roman nation, which once stood so high, but was then seduced, debased, unnerved, dispirited, and finally pruned out from among the branches of mankind as unfit to live? Where men only recognize and have a material world of the senses, Herodian sensuality will soon reign, slay every organ for the purer world, and sink ever deeper down into its mire of immorality.

Oh! That white figure confronting Herod! Do you not feel upon you His pained and sorrowful look? His warning look to all that are His, to yield not a finger or take one step toward this frivolity of a Herod? Do you not realize the awful earnestness of His silence? In Herod and all such He finds no point of contact, nothing He can lay hold of, and—He *gives them up!* God help our people! God help our youth! God keep each one of us from deserving such silent contempt in the face of this noble figure in the white robe!

“Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day.” They were veritable antipodes. But have we not lived long enough to see men, who belong to two opposing camps, yes, in reality to two different worlds, joined together in mutual hatred of some third man, or party, or policy. How

much more easily indifference and frivolity may walk arm in arm!

Again I remind you: that open hatred our Lord met was not the bitterest cup for His soul. Hatred can taste bitter and burn; but in it there is still something of respect and recognition. Hatred may come from earnest souls, who fall into error; and, as we see in many a soul, may undergo a wonderful transformation. But indifference pours disrespect into the cup; frivolity an utter contempt.

Would that you were His friend, or His foe! There is more hope for an honest foe, than for these uninterested Pilates and mocking Herods. He says: "Because thou art luke warm," indifferent, "I will spew thee out of my mouth." "Give diligence then, and repent. For I stand at the door and knock, I, the King of Truth, the King in the garments of white!" Amen.

A PORTRAIT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

INVOCAVIT; FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

II COR. 6: 1-10

"And working together with Him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain for He saith,

At an acceptable time I harkened unto thee,
And in a day of salvation did I succor thee:

behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation: giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that our ministration be not blamed; but in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distress, in stripes, in imprisonments in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Through Good Report and Evil, Lord.
How Blessed from the Bonds of Sin. V. 3.
O Love, how Deep, how Broad, how High.
Jesus, my Lord, my God, my All.
My Dear Redeemer, and my Lord. V. 4.
A While in Spirit, Lord, to Thee. V. 3.

An Epistle with great and majestic contents!

The words are so forceful and expressive that whatever we add seems feeble in comparison. It is monumental and stands before us like some classic statue or picture. We prefer to let it exert its own quiet influence upon you, and refuse to have anything to do with the commentators, who, in trying to explain it with a flood of words, drown out its living force. We are always afraid of playing that role, and would rather read to you such a text, and read it again and again, and leave its effect to God and His Spirit, who gave us this word.

But you are expecting a sermon on this Epistle. Well, its opening phrase here gives me courage for that, namely "As workers together with Him" (A. V.). With this saying the apostle describes the modest task, set before us ministers of the word. We are to be *helpers*, and that is all; to help by our human words, so that the Divine Word may be understood, and may find a way into the soul that hears it. Thank God, the biggest part of this work must be done by the Word itself, and by the Lord, who deals directly with your heart and conscience through this word. All we can do is to help a little here and there, and to such human help all of us are directed in the end. We all need constant help on the Way of Salvation, mutual assistance and guidance; and many among us realize how much we have in our spiritual life for which to thank others.

Please regard this poor attempt to preach as an effort to assist one and another among you in your inner life. We would gladly help you in thought and feeling, doing and bearing, to wear Christ's image, and become,

A PORTRAIT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

such as the great apostle draws here, in this pen picture presented in our Epistle. It is a face which has *three prominent features*. In it Paul outlines a *warning*, an *exhortation*, and a *promise*. He begins with the

WARNING

This reads: "That ye receive not the grace of God in vain." Our God has many bits of grace, a great variety of gracious approach to us. Sometimes He shows us grace in outward things: health, deliverance from danger and distress, prosperity in business, blessings in the home. And is it not a sad thing, when any man receives such friendly greetings from his God, without making any hearty response, without asking: "How can I thank Thee for this? How prove my gratitude?" This, in a word, is what the apostle means by "receiving God's grace *in vain*;" only his idea of *grace* goes much deeper. He speaks of "*The grace of God*," and by this means that highest and inmost grace, in which God knocks loudly at our conscience to awaken it; and calls and draws our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not one among us, who has not experienced grace at work in us. Some have felt more of it; others less. But the more we experience it, the weightier is our responsibility, "not to receive it in vain." Therefore this warning! You have doubtlessly had a father, or a mother, who were living index-fingers pointing you to the Lord. You realize, that you will have more to answer for, than some one brought up in a heathen home, if you do not heed this pointing finger, if for you such grace is *in vain*! Beside these you have other persons to thank for inestimable bless-

ings in your spiritual life. It does not matter, whether they are still living, or have long been asleep in the grave; whether it was some person of prominence with a wide circle of influence, or only a plain every-day Christian known to but few. All such helpers are gracious gifts from God; and you surely feel that you are put to shame, if you receive such friends *in vain*. You have been mightily impressed by some saying of God, or His providences have drawn you to the Lord Jesus, literally dragged you there, and fairly thrown you into His arms, and upon His great warm Saviour-heart. Do you think it of no consequence what these providences work out in you? Are you indifferent about them? Do you receive them *in vain*? For every man such *seasons* of grace come, when the saying applies to him: "*Now is the acceptable time* (the time when he may find acceptance with the Lord); behold, *now is the day of salvation.*" And if this "Now" has come to you in vain, it may happen that there will never be another gracious opportunity for you!

"Now"—the word fairly stares us out of countenance. Now, you confirmants, who are on your way to the altar to make your public confession of Christ; now, you who have had some visible demonstration of God's help; now, you who were ready to sink beneath waves of trouble, like Peter in the waves of Galilee, and cried: "Lord, help me!"; now, you who were tormented by your guilt, until the Lord reached out to you His saving hand—may the Spirit of God never leave you, until you *now* grasp this Saviour's hand; today, while you may grasp it in firm and fervent faith; today, to hold fast all the days, even unto the end!

And for us all there *now* has begun a special time of grace. In this *Passion Season* the "grace of God that bringeth salvation" has come nearer to us than before, and gazes upon us imploringly in the "Sacred Head now wounded." Let not this day of grace pass by us unimproved, but let us use it as it was intended, to take our place under the Cross of Christ, and to open our hearts to this grace from above. The sainted Ahlfeld said, in a sermon on this Epistle: "You know how once the dove with the olive branch fluttered about the ark. But it was to fly *into* the ark with its glad tidings. And for this Noah had opened the window. Just so the grace, which God offers us in Christ Jesus, sways above your heart and mine with the olive branch of peace with God. But it can enter only when we open the window for it. It flies here and there; it waits, watches, flutters against the window panes, looks for an open window, listens for some sigh from the heart that feels for its misery, some cry for grace from the lips." But if all this is in vain, then "Grace at last flies away, and may never come again." "*Now* is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "We entreat you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

And if we do not receive the grace of God in vain, if we open the window, what will this mean for us and our lives? The apostle tells us in the second part of our Epistle, in its

EXHORTATION,

"In everything *commending ourselves, as ministers of God.*" This runs like a thread of gold through the next verses.

We will then no longer live out our life as something belonging to us, but as a life belonging pre-eminently to God. "Whom I serve," will be the motto and spirit of our lives, and we will be ministers to God in all the things which follow in the following verses. Among that long list we will point out a few special things here and there.

First, "in *much patience*." This the apostle places first among the many identification marks of a heart which has not received the grace of God in vain. And what else is God's grace itself, but patience, endless, daily, Divine patience with us? Now this soft light is to be reflected from us as our patience toward our neighbor, toward wife and child, and all about us; and again as our patience when the hand of God visits and smites us, when we must go through Passion Seasons and walk the Way of the Cross. Holy Scripture is always exalting this patience as the great virtue of the child of God: Have patience; "God shall help, and that right early," says the Old Testament (Ps. 46:5); and the New repeats it: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:2)."

And how wonderfully Paul himself exhibits it "in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults!" It is true that we do not have to undergo today such severe tests; but who does not know that the fine art of patience is harder to practice in the little trials of life, than in many great ones? How few can tread under foot with the Divine strength of patience, the little stones on the road, the little pin-pricks from our neighbor, the little miseries of life! How often we must be ashamed of our impatience over wretched

trifles, under little annoyances, when we stand by some heart-rending sick bed, or visit a family which has had one trouble after another, and find there a patient faith, which makes us blush before our God.

"In *labors*," the apostle continues. Yes, let us commend ourselves as ministers (servants) of God by faithful and joyful labors. We often hear men complain about, "Too much work," in these busy times which exhaust all our powers. But would you rather say: "Too little work," or, "No work at all?" How many seek work anxiously, and can not find it! Thank God if you have it, and now show yourself a servant of God, redeeming the swiftly passing time by labor, and yet more abundant labors.

"In *watching*, in *fasting*." Do we read aright? Even in fasting? Yes, Paul often fasted, often went without food and drink. He sometimes was forced to do this, because he could not get them, yet bore the lack willingly. In the Bible sense fasting includes all that we give up and do without out of love to God and our brethren. Note the words which stand in our text so close to fasting. One of these is *watching*. When a poor widow sits up far into the night after her day's work, to sew for her little fatherless children; or when some friend watches unselfishly by a sick bed, sacrificing sleep and rest for the sufferer, this is fasting in the Evangelical sense.

As we read on, we come to "*knowledge*." This we gain from books among other sources. When then some one in this Passion Season lays aside books of mere worldly wisdom and entertainment; and reads in their stead some sermon, or devo-

tional book, or sinks himself deeply into our Saviour's Passion History (and we in our church have so many such good books), that is a true and blessed fast. Again, we read: "In kindness," and, "*In love unfeigned.*" When you give up pleasure or gain. to be kind to another; when you stay at home, that another may go out; stand back, that a friend may be made honored or made happy; deny yourself something, that the needs and cares of others may be relieved; that is true kindness, love unfeigned, a fasting which avails before God. Oh! That we all were more given to such Lenten and life-long fasting!

The apostle did all this, and did it, as he says, "*In the power of God.*" Yes, we know whence Paul drew this power: from his steadfast "looking unto Jesus." And what wonderful *patience our Lord* displayed, not only in His intercourse with all kinds of men, but also "in afflictions, in necessities, in distress." He was always the patient Servant of Jehovah, even under the deepest necessities of his soul in Gethsemane, and the awful distress of the cross! And those words: "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults," were literally true of our Saviour too. The stripes were laid upon His bleeding back; He was taken captive and bound; and about Him raged the tumult of a blinded and bloodthirsty mob.

As for "labors," how faithful He was in the bitter, burdensome work of our redemption! And how often He "watched and fasted!" And yet through it all He was full of "kindness and love unfeigned." His whole life was one powerful warfare, wielding "*the word of truth, in the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right*

hand and on the left." In short, if you wish to sum up this whole second part of our Epistle in a single saying, you need only say: "Be followers of your Lord and Saviour!" The longer we look at His Passion, and the more thoughtfully; the more earnestly our hearts take hold of it; the more we will feel that this is the very picture the apostle is portraying here before our eyes. We Christians are exhorted to live and love, bear and forbear, battle on and die, as our Saviour did; to be like Him.

And then the third portion of this Epistle will begin to be verified in us, the part which is its golden crown, the

PROMISE,

which Paul makes all such disciples and followers of Jesus, as he writes: "By glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, . . . as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

When we read these words, must we not feel again how the image of the Saviour stands before the soul of the apostle as he writes them. In His whole life Christ goes through "*glory and dishonor, evil report and good report.*" Peter confesses Him as "the Son of the Living God;" but the Jews say of Him that "He has a demon." A thousand taunts are hurled at Him as He hangs there on the cross; but the centurion beneath it cries out: "Truly this was a righteous man, and the Son of God." How often the Pharisees called Him a "*deceiver*," and finally accused Him to Pilate as one misleading the people; and yet if there ever was a man true down to the last fibres of his heart,

it was He; yea He is the Truth itself. When He hung on the cross, He was "*unknown*" to men; they knew not what they did, otherwise they would never have crucified Him. And yet He was "known" to His Father in Heaven, known to Him as "His Beloved Son in whom He was well pleased," and as such He is known today among men. Again, as He hung there His foes looked upon His "*dying*," and triumphed over Him; but behold! He lives! They esteemed Him "*chastened*," "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," and yet He was not killed. There on the cross He cried: "My God, my God (Isa. 53: 4); why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet soon afterward He could shout with joyful certainty: "It is finished." There He was "*poor*" indeed; even His clothes were stripped off Him; and He was laid in a borrowed grave, that was not His own. Yet in spite of all His poverty, He "made rich" the penitent thief in his last hour, and has enriched many more, because He poured out His soul unto death, and bare the sin of many (Isa. 53: 12). He above all men, was "*as having nothing*," and yet "*possessing all things*;" for He still had His Father, into whose hands He could commend His parting spirit, and He knew that this Father "had given all things into his hands (John 13: 3)."

And what is true in the fullest measure of our Great Head, must now be reflected in the pocket mirror of His disciples and members; these same paradoxes, or seeming contradictions, will appear again in their lives. He who has a little of the life in Christ Jesus will feel that this Christian life has been masterfully portrayed here, in its deep mysteries and twofold puzzles. On the one hand it

means a constant laying down of our strength; and yet on the other a continual victory through the heavenly power Christ gives us. To this very day the disciples of Jesus hear themselves called "*deceivers*;" and yet have the comforting assurance, that they walk the "true" way which leads to life. They must be content to be "*unknown*," and insignificant people; but find great comfort in the Saviour's words: "I know mine own, and mine own know me" (John 10:14). In one way we are "*dying*," and there is many a deadly thrust which our old man must feel; but in another way we "*live*," and feel in us a life that will never die, for Christ lives in us. We are "*sorrowful*," about our own weaknesses, and troubled by wicked and devilish things in the world, troubled beneath the hundred-fold crosses and tribulations of life. Yet the thing that lifts the Christian up is God's hand, wisely ruling and safely keeping us always; and thus we are always "*rejoicing*" in our God. The Christian feels that he is "*poor*," alas! often so very poor. And yet, when he thinks it over, he is "*rich*," richer than he and others realize, so rich that he would not exchange his lot with any rich man of this world. And when the apostle speaks of such "*making many rich*," it is a timely reminder to those who say: "What can I do for my fellow men, and for the Kingdom of God; I, who have so little, and am too poor to share my daily bread?" Let such note what Paul says here: "You, who seem so poor, can yet give much, very much to others. You may make them inwardly and eternally rich with your love, with your testimony and example, if it draws them to Christ. O beloved, how many this very Paul made rich out of the treasures of

his heart! And he is still enriching men today, although he has long been in his grave; making us rich in this very hour by this message which uplifts our souls! In short, with one sentence the apostle solves the whole mystery and riddle of our Christian life, when he says we are, "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." For we may say: "I have Thee, Lord, and in Thee all things!"

In the verse which follows our Epistle, Paul continues: "Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged." And Luther translates it: "Our heart is comforted." If today but one of this audience goes home with the inner assurance: "My heart is enlarged; my heart is comforted," then I shall feel richly repaid for what little I could do as a "worker together with God." Amen.

GOOD COUNSEL AGAINST WEARINESS ON LIFE'S WAY

REMINISCERE; SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

HEB. 12: 1-4

"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a crowd of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that hath endured such gain-saying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

My Faith Looks up to Thee.

Love Divine, all Love Excelling. Vs. 2 and 4.

Through Good Report and Evil, Lord. V. 3ff.

In the Cross of Christ I Glory.

Lord Jesus, when we Stand Afar.

How Blessed from the Bonds of Sin. V. 4.

"*Reminiscere*," or "Remember," is the time-honored name of this Sunday. In Luther's translation of our text the very same word stands in the midst of it: "Remember (or consider)," and tells us upon what all our thought should be focused: "Him, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross." It is part of the Eisenach Lectionary's Epistle for Palm Sunday, and just the right passage for this Lenten Season, when we ac-

company our Saviour upon the Way of His Passion, until He "endures the Cross."

"*Consider Him!*" cries the author of this Epistle to his Hebrew readers. And he had abundant reason for so counseling them. They were Christians whose lot was especially hard. The foes of the Faith surrounded them, mocking and making fun of them, tormenting and persecuting them. They had made a good and joyous beginning as Christians, but were now in danger of *waxing weary*, and *fainting* as the battle went on. The unnamed author of this Epistle aims to fill the hearts of his fellow Hebrews with new courage.

And how well we know, that the same great task is set before us all, and that each in his own environment must "*run with patience the race* that is set before us." That patience means steadfastness, persistence. But how fares our "endurance race?" Our patient, joyful running in the way God appoints us? Who is not familiar with the words: "Waxing weary, fainting, growing discouraged, giving up." When our pathway of life is "lined with crosses," as one old hymn says; is a Passion-way through many a woe and wound, he would not be human, who did not at times become lamed, and lose the elasticity that holds out in a race. I may safely presume, that more than one in this gathering has often been of this mind, which is the mind to give up; and in this mood, which is the passive mood of a weary and weakened heart. The more heartily would I commend to you this Scripture, which seems written especially for you, and confronts you today. Yes, we all can make use of it, now or later on, as it resolves itself into a well-tested,

GOOD COUNSEL AGAINST WEARINESS ON LIFE'S WAY.

There are more of these counsels here, than we notice at the first glance. Let us seek them earnestly, and we shall find them.

* * * *

In this discussion the author has in his mind's eye a picture of the Greek games. He sees the *runners* darting along in the course roped off for them; and the *boxers* and *wrestlers* in their hot contests by the side of the race course. And he recalls how all these, when they grow weary and winded in the struggle, are fired with renewed courage and strength by a look at the *cloud of witnesses*, whose eyes follow them with straining sympathy.

For this reason he begins our text: "Seeing *we* are compassed about with so great a cloud of *witnesses*." The preceding chapter gives us a panorama of these: a long row of figures from the times *before Christ*, heroes of faith who amid the most trying circumstances stood fast, and held fast their trust in God and His promises. But since that time this cloud of witnesses has been increased a hundred-fold by all the martyrs and confessors of the *Christian* world. Here are the great apostles themselves; and a little farther on in history the martyrs in the persecutions of the Roman Empire, who let themselves be thrown to the lions rather than deny their faith, and be burned to death as living torches in the gardens of Nero, rather than desert the Way of God's Truth. Look again, at the numberless witnesses of the Counter-Reformation, true to their Evangelical faith on the rack, the scaffold, and at the stake. Recall the missionaries, who down to our day often lay down their

lives in spreading the Gospel. See about you also men and women who in secular callings stand fast, labor, and struggle as Christian heroes, and prove by their lives the power of God. This cloud of witnesses—do you not see them about you, as you run your race? How their eyes follow *your* course, and hope for your victory! Among them stand your father, mother, or other never-to-be-forgotten figures from your life; do you not feel their eyes upon you? And, more than this, how they cheer and encourage you, calling out: "Keep on, as we did! Hold out to the end!"

There is a mighty inspiration for us in these great figures of history; and I am certain we would have more heroic Christian personalities today in all walks of life, if we studied more diligently the Lives of the Church's Great Men. It is gratifying that they begin to be presented more and more in pageants and other popular ways. There springs a blessing from the biographies of such examples, ten-fold greater than ordinary stories and histories impart.

Yes, I go farther. Must the cloud of witnesses be only those who have departed from us, the sainted and glorified? Are there not among the *living* those who strengthen us by their examples? Do you not know some, it may be little noticed by this great world, who "run with patience their race," with most admirable patience the hard race set before them? Some who shine brightly in their corner with the quiet light of Christian heroism? Look about you, and you will find some in your own circle, from whom you may learn, and learn much indeed. I urge each of you to seek such examples, and then follow them faithfully.

All this is suggested by our text, for the prevention of growing weariness on the way of the Christian life. Heed then this cloud of witnesses about you.

* * * *

Then follows something we ourselves are to do, if we would run well. Notice this further advice!

"Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us therefore *lay aside every weight*," all ballast. That was the first thing the Greek athlete did; he put away from him everything in clothing, food, or body, which would hinder, burden, or cripple him.

The directions are plain enough; and I promise great results to those who will follow them. When you feel you are not accomplishing what God requires of you, or not in the right way, test yourself honestly and earnestly, and discover what hinders and handicaps you. Begin with the simplest outward things: your wrong way of living, your habits in eating and drinking, in working and resting, or the lack of good order and schedule, which results in neglecting important things through attending to unimportant trifles. And when you come to the hindrances within, things which handicap the soul, mark what snares your heart and diverts it from the true course, from the "one thing needful." You can surely find such things. The rich young man did, when Jesus told him to his face: "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute to the poor (Luke 18: 22)." Yes, his riches were *his* fatal handicap, endangering *his* soul. And with you it may be that same seeking after gold and gain, or entertainment and pleasure, or dress and ornament, or the love of the theatre and the social circle (Wirtshaus-

leben), or fads and phantasies which draw you away from your duties. How many are loaded down with such worthless ballast! Or their cares and the ghosts of a hundred worries wear them to pieces, as though our God had never caused that verse to be written: "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you (I Peter 5:7)!"

Dear Christians, we are in the Lenten Season. And the Evangelical fasting, which God commands, consists in giving up and denying ourselves those things which we know lame and chain our inner powers. Yes, let us break these bonds energetically, and cast such ballast overboard. And even if it is something which has grown to be a part of ourselves, like our very eye, that endangers us. "Cast it out," says the master, "it is good for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell (Mark 9:47)."

* * * *

"Let us lay aside every weight, and *the sin* which doth so *easily beset us*." This is the mightiest hindrance to a steadfast and joyous course; an uncanny hobble like the meshes of a net enveloping us, a leaden weight hanging upon us. This calls for a *fighting and wrestling* beside the race, and *while* we run it. And it demands first of all, that I cultivate a sharp eye for *that* particular bit of sin which *cleaves* to me, and trips up my feet. When it is a matter of bodily health, we take for granted that a man will study his own case, and avoid what experience teaches him he cannot do without suffering bitter consequences. Why do we not follow the same sensible principle in the hygiene of the soul? When you know which organ of the soul is weak, and only too ready to catch the infection

of sin, why not battle in its defence? But it must be a real battle, and not a mere beating of the air. Later on our text raises the objection: "*Ye have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin.*"

It is clear enough to us, that the drunkard can never be rid of his sin, until he resists it unto blood, will not give way to it one inch, refuses to touch one drop of what became poison for his soul. But is not this true of every sinful inclination? Whether it be exaggeration and falsehood that cleaves to us, or contemptible selfishness and vanity, or sinful lust; whether we are too hasty or too sensitive; whether we are too timid and easily silenced, or too apt to contradict, argue, and know better; whether we worry about the mote in the eyes of others, and forget the beam in our own; let us ask, yes ask from the Word of God, whether we have resisted unto blood in striving against this *our* sin! If you will read the histories and confessions of model Christians, you will be impressed by their earnestness in wrestling with self, in resisting apparently small faults. They struggled to lay aside every weight and besetting sin, as our Epistle counsels us to do.

* * * *

But we hasten on to the heart of our Epistle. Its author counsels all, who grow weary in faith or hope, in affection or under affliction, as they run their race, to "*Look unto Jesus* the author and perfecter of our faith." You feel in these words, that he has no better advice to give, and that he knows from his own experience the value of this counsel.

Centuries have gone by since this was written, and mankind has undergone unspeakable changes, and made discoveries and progress in every direc-

tion. But who dare say, that we have ever found anything to work upon our inmost souls, like this "looking unto Jesus;" anything to uplift, help, and hallow us like this? He remains to this very hour the only guide of countless souls, who looking unto Him, are able to endure and conquer in the race set before them. You know how much it means for weary, worn out soldiers in a battle, to have a leader go before them with the unbroken courage which constrains them to follow! Jesus is such a captain in all the battles of our life, the captain of our faith; and He who crowns our faith, who brings it to perfection. He proves to us what it means to believe, and to persevere in believing, and what this accomplishes. Look unto Him on the cross! Is not that the perfection of believing trust, when in the deep hell of being forsaken by God, He holds fast to Him even there, as: "*My God, My God!*" And is not that the perfection of believing love, which prays for His murderers even as He dies: "*Father forgive them!*" And is not this the perfection of believing hope, which in all His anguish of body and soul maintains a lamblike silence, until at last He can exultantly exclaim: "*It is finished!*"

Whatever it may be, that you think beyond human strength to bear, follow this ancient counsel, "*Look unto Jesus,*" and you will find Him looking down upon *you*, with a look that pierces bone and marrow, that shames you and strengthens you at the same time. If you must bear bitter things from others, perhaps from those near and dear, remember that He bore from Peter, from Judas, and how behind the traitor He beheld the hand of the Father, turning the evil into good. Or, if you feel forsaken and alone, think of Him whom all the

fleeing disciples forsook, and yet how He said: "I am not alone, but it is I and the Father that sent me (John 8:16)." Or, is your loneliness of a spiritual kind; and does the thought distress you, that there are so many about you who refuse to recognize the entire Christ fully, who mock and scorn much that is His, and make that man feel lonely who really holds to Him and all the counsel of God? Then read over and over again what our Epistle says: "Consider him that hath *endured such gainsaying* of sinners against himself." Through all His life that opposition went on, until even on the cross they sneered: "If thou art the Son of God come down from the cross!" (Matth. 27:40) and "He trusted on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him (v. 43)!" Consider how the true Christianity fared then, and picture to yourself how they felt who confessed it, and He who proclaimed it; how lonely He hung there among the malefactors, who was a martyr to the truth; how lonely they felt, who clung to Him: those few women under the cross and only that *one man!* "Consider" this, when the gainsaying of today begins to disturb you, "that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls."

Let us look unto Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him *endured the cross.*" That last word is a significant term, which has become a synonym in the Christian world for *our sufferings*. But let him who uses the word always ask himself two questions: "Is my suffering, beneath which I sigh, at all comparable to *His Cross?*" "Ye have not yet resisted unto *blood,*" the writer says, as he points us to the blood Jesus shed. And the second question is: "Do I bear *my* cross as *He* bore His,

and as I am here admonished, looking up to His Cross?"

"Looking unto Jesus," finally, reminds us of that scene in the wilderness, where Moses lifted up on a standard the Brazen Serpent, as the healing remedy for those bitten by the fiery serpents, and it was recorded, that: "If a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:9)." Thus says the New Testament "must the Son of man be lifted up (John 3:14)," on the cross, and from the cross to the right hand of the Father, that healing power may flow down from Him into all who look up unto Him. For he who looks unto Him, will feel a magnetic attraction drawing him to Christ, and *after* Him, and *into* His trust, His sufferings, His glory. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself (John 12:34)."

Thus He becomes in the deepest sense, "The Author and Perfecter of *our* Faith." Ask all, who have come to believe, and grown strong in the faith, whom they thank for this. They will answer un-animously, that they owe to Him the first feeble *beginning* of their faith, and also its *perfecting* in the fires of affliction. This is the Divine mystery about the Christ: you cannot look unto Him, without faith beginning to sprout and spring up in your heart; and the longer you look the deeper this faith will root, until it becomes a perfect trust that follows Him under His Cross, and shall also follow Him into His glory. "Where I am there shall also my servant be (John 12:26)."

When the first Christian martyr, Stephen, perfected his faith amid the hurtling stones which slew him, he *looked unto Jesus* once more, and be-

held this Lord and Master of his "standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). From that upward look he gathered grace and strength to kneel down and pray loudly for his persecutors: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And he certainly knew, who it was that helped and strengthened him, for, as the last deadly stone was flung, Stephen cried: "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*"

Now, with what wish shall I close? May this text with its counsels bring you and me some permanent assistance against any weariness on life's way! Amid the daily help of the Author and Perfector of our Faith may we experience what Isaiah (40:31) testifies: "They that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and *not be weary*; they shall walk, and *not faint.*" Amen.

TAKING UP OUR CROSS

OCULI; THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

MATTH. 26: 36-46

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this can not pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words. Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Art Thou Weary, art Thou Languid.
In the Cross of Christ I Glory.
Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessing.
What'er thy God Ordains is Right.
What Our Father Does is Well.
My Jesus, as Thou Wilt.

"Christian, dost thou hear them,
How they speak thee fair:
"Always fast and vigil?
Always watch and prayer?"
Christian, answer boldly,
"While I breathe I pray,"
Peace shall follow battle,
Night shall end in day."

It was a cruel Roman custom that those condemned to be crucified were forced to lift the cross which had been made for them, place it upon their shoulders, and carry it to the place of execution. Our Lord also was compelled to do this. He had to take up His own cross Himself, and take it upon Himself. But this He did, long before the Roman soldiers fell in line for the march out to Golgotha, in a far harder way in this hour in Gethsemane. The Prophet (Is. 53:4) says: "Surely He hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows. If "Bearing our griefs," would be a fitting inscription over Golgotha, the remainder of the verse would be the title for Gethsemane: "He (*took up and*) *carried* our sorrows."

And what a hard task it was for Him to take up the cross. Here it was not the soldiers, but the Father in Heaven, who laid the cross down before Him. And again it was hard, that the Father did not lay it upon Him, but demanded that He Himself should bend down into the dust, take it up, and lay it upon Himself. An agonizing sweat burst from His pores, as He bent to this task. Twice He took hold of the cross; twice He let go, and straightened His back again; the third time He stood up with the cross upon His bended back, and the resolution in His heart:

"Yea, Father, this shall be My part:
Lay on, and I will bear it!"

We are fully aware Christian friends, of how great the mysteries are before which we stand. As we lead you into this sanctuary, Gethsemane, we do so with fear and trembling. Yes, if Jesus suffered His chosen disciples to witness this deepest struggle of His soul only from afar, we too seem to hear His voice saying: "Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray." But meanwhile, we shall not go away empty-handed, if we only catch some idea from afar of what went on there in the shadows of Gethsemane; if from His taking up the cross we can only gain a little light upon His solemn declaration: "He that doth not take *his* cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me (Matth. 10: 38)." Notice, that Jesus does not say: "That refuses to *let his cross be laid* upon him;" but; "That *does not take*," lift up, and lay it upon himself.

Let us then go in spirit to Gethsemane, and learn what is meant by,

THE TAKING UP OF THE CROSS;
His cross, and my cross

It was night, when Jesus and His little band walked out into the lonely garden. What may be a remnant of it is still seen at the foot of the Mount of Olives; and among all the holy places about Jerusalem none grasps our hearts in its very hand, as does this still and solemn garden. I have stood, deeply moved, beneath its ancient and revered olive trees (said to be shoots from those of our Saviour's day), and words can not describe the sacred awe which pervaded me. At the entrance

of this garden Jesus left the larger part of His disciples. Only three, the trustiest, remained by His side. But in the midst of the garden He tore Himself away even from these, groaning: "My soul is *exceeding sorrowful*, even unto death;" and then went by Himself a stone's throw further into the deep shadows, and cast Himself upon the ground. His whole body trembled; His *inmost* soul shivered.

What was it He *dreaded* so much? Was this the anxiety and fear of death? No! For then Stephen amid the hurtling stones would have been braver in the face of death than Jesus, and countless martyrs as well! Yet who was it, that made them so strong? Who gave them the courage to die? They all answer in unison: "Jesus." Such courage cannot proceed from one, who Himself trembles at death! Here there is something more than death which Jesus must face—a gloomy, black, uncanny thing, which makes *His* dying so dreadful. And what is this dark monster He must meet? Do we not see it approaching in this frightful night! It rolls over this innocent one as an immense unheard-of avalanche of guilt! He who pitied all sinners, is swallowed up by sin in its hellish perfection. Who must not recall here the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the *sin of the world!*" (John 1:29)," and that other saying "Jehovah hath laid on Him the *iniquity of us all* (Isa. 53: 6)." This was the mountain-high burden piled upon His soul, the horrid and frightful thing that He dreaded.

And yet, behind this uncanny incubus prepared for Him by *men*, there was something else: the holy mystery *from above*, the *Divine* counsel and will. Note the words: "Jehovah, or, *the Lord* hath laid

on Him;" and, "Behold the Lamb of *God*." Did He not speak of a "*cup*," which the *Father* had given Him to drink? Had He not foreseen and foretold, that the Son of Man would "give his life as ransom for many (Matth. 20:28)?" Did He not but an hour before at the Holy Supper speak solemnly of "His body *given for you*," and "His blood *shed for you*, for the *remission of sins*?"

Yet we will not undertake to unveil before your eyes the dark mystery of Gethsemane. Who can fathom all the meaning of that bitter "*cup*" He must needs drink, or of the cross He must shoulder! But here in Gethsemane we are taught with holy certainty, *that* our Lord took it up, and *how* He shouldered it; and it is to this we turn with attentive hearts.

Naturally, at first this scene appears the very opposite of a willing taking up of the cross. Something in our Saviour *rebels* against the cross with trembling limbs and bloody sweat. For us that is a great, great comfort. It is not sinful, but only human, to fear and tremble before such soul-shattering sorrow. Anything else would be an unnatural stoicism, which pretended not to see how dark it was, and feel how heavy. If your child was sick unto death, if one you loved was wrung with speechless pain, would it be natural for you to be unconcerned? Beside this God rolls burdens upon us, that we may feel them; has fitted us to sigh and tremble; and given us tears that we may weep, though not in cowardly weakness, certainly not. But, when we have to deal with a great sorrow, which deserves the name of a "*bitter cup*," or a "*heavy cross*," then our human heart is not forbidden to tremble, or to shiver as we see it coming,

or to shrink from that cup and cross. Yet, of course, this is a natural prelude, and *not* a drinking of the cup, or a *taking up of the cross*.

Another thing is not forbidden. I am thinking now of the three trusted disciples our Lord took with Him in this awful hour. Their *presence* was *helpful* to him, comforting and strengthening. Of course it was plain, that they were not the right props for *Him* to lean upon in *this* hour. They could not help Him; no man could. Yet it was a need He plainly felt, that they, who could understand, should be near Him. So He expressly entreats them: "Abide ye here, and watch with Me." They are to share His sorrow with Him! How truly human the Son of God is in this! It is human in the hottest struggles of life to seek the comfort of sympathetic love and alike human to grant to sorely tried hearts this comfort of sympathizing love. Even the sick child wishes mother to hold its feverish hand, wishes her to stay near. And if we find true hearts, to whom we can pour out our troubles, and who "feel with" us, pray for us, and thus share in our troubles, thank God for them! They give us more courage for our cup and cross, yet it is *we ourselves*, who must *drink the cup* and *take up the cross*. That last great battle of our lives each one of us must fight *through alone*. Even our Saviour was thrown at last utterly upon His own resources, and in those dreadful hours "trode the wine press alone." And we enter now Gethsemane's holy of holies, as we follow Him, and see *with what weapon* He wages this lonely battle.

He falls down before His Father in—*prayer*. Oh! My friends, if there ever was a convincing,

gripping apology (defence) for prayer, it is this picture of our Redeemer in Gethsemane, on His knees, wrestling in prayer. If for Him there was no other way to find strength and peace for His soul, how can there be for us? If we were to quote here the current proverb:

“’Tis ever need
Doth Godward lead,”

that saying would be only half true. Need does not always open the heart in prayer; often it closes a prayerless heart in bitter defiance, or utter hopelessness. This one thing is established here: Jesus teaches us in Gethsemane that we should pray. Out of that garden rings His earnest admonition: “*Watch and pray!*” Whoever, then, means to be His disciple, taught and led by Him, will follow Him in this *habit* of prayer.

But let no one deal lightly with this weighty word, “Prayer.” It means more, than *experimenting* with prayer, when we are in trouble; knocking then at God’s door, with the possibility of being disappointed, when no help or change comes, and then declaring blasphemously: “There can not be any God in Heaven.” Is that prayer, such as our Lord prayed? I need not remind you, how His whole life was a constant prayerful communion with His Father, and how often He had sought this quiet garden before this, and spent whole nights in prayer. Once again He is not knocking casually, but habitually at His Father’s heart, still clinging to Him and communing in prayer with Him. And we wait in eager expectation to hear *what* His prayer is.

“My Father,” He says, “if it be possible, let this

cup pass from Me!" He asks to be *spared*, to be kept from this frightful fate. This gives us courage and comfort in our times of anxiety, to come before this Father with child-like trust, tell Him all our troubles and humbly ask the indulgence our hearts so much desire. When confronted by some threatening ordeal, you too *dare* pray: "My Father, all things are possible with Thee, ward off this evil from me!" Under the burden of some crushing affliction, you *dare* entreat: "My God and Father, my strength is giving out; lift this burden from me!"

But before your prayer has run dry, be sure to add: "*If it be possible*; if it fits in with Thy plan and will." At the very first wrestling here, of our Saviour, although His soul shrinks from the overwhelming flood, it is not in rebellion. And the longer He prays, the more we are impressed to see His natural *shrinking* from the cup changing into an humble *surrender*; the *human* "No" metamorphosed more and more into the *Divine* "Yes;" the hand withdrawn from the cup, becoming stronger *to grasp* that cup, although with trembling. Notice, how after He hastened to the disciples, seeking in vain to lean upon them, and has wrestled in prayer the second time, His words are different from the first time. Then He said: "If it be possible, etc." But now He prays: "If this cannot pass away (if it is *not* possible), *Thy will be done*."

Would that all our prayers might end thus: "If it is not possible, *Thy will be done*!" That is the silent language, which our folded hands speak: "I place my hands in Thine, and let Thine bind them fast;" and the sign language of our bended knees:

"I bow my will to Thy will." In the Lord's Prayer our Saviour has laid this resignation and surrender upon our hearts as a standing petition; "Thy will be done!" It is rightly called the hardest petition, but when we have learned it aright it gives us more strength than any other. "If this cup cannot pass away, except I drink it, Thy will be done." When we have learned this by heart, there may be some trembling left, but our lips are *still*, and our souls *hold still* before the God who rules, but also loves and helps us as a Father.

Another question confronts us here, and we will not try to avoid it. Had not our Lord long ago foreseen His gloomy fate, and bowed obediently beneath the Father's will? Long ago found help from God to meet this crisis with open eyes? Did He not say days before to His disciples, with this same inmost distress: "Now is my soul troubled," and then add with the courage of victory: "And what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour! (John 12: 27)." In His high priestly prayer, as He sat at the last supper with His disciples, were not His eyes fixed on the glory He was soon to have with His Father, and His soul full of heavenly peace? Why then this *breaking down* again, this bitter *struggle* again in His soul? Without explaining, I simply state the fact; and I ask, who among us has not had the very same experience in great trouble. With God's help we got so far as to surrender ourselves, were reconciled to the coming trial, and gained some strength as we grasped His hand. But then came new seasons of darkness, fear and trembling, new cries for help. Especially was this the case in the immediate nearness of the

thing we dreaded; when the time was at hand to translate our courageous mind into the brave deed. Then we experienced how, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." You see: "*One battle does not end the war.*" And that this was the case with Jesus is another great comfort to me. That is a meaningful saying about Him in Hebrews (5:8): "Though He was a Son (of God), yet *learned* He obedience by the things He suffered." In ever *new* battles of the soul He learned this, in renewed victories of the spirit.

And He did learn that *obedience*, obedience even unto death, yea, the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). When He returned again from His disciples, and cast Himself down a second time in the dust, He wrestled anew and asked the Father: "Is it not possible, Father? Is there no other way to carry out Thy counsels for man's redemption?" And the answer is made to Him: "No other way." His prayer closes with these same words: "*Not as I will, but as thou wilt.*" And with this the battle *ends* and the victory is *won*; with this He places Himself obediently in full surrender to the will of His Father; with this He *takes hold of* the cross, and *lays* it upon Himself as a strong and holy volunteer. And now as one transformed He turns to His disciples, saying: "Sleep on now and take your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand. . . . Arise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth Me!" No longer the trembling lamb, He goes forth now as the overcoming lion to meet the approaching enemies. His new spirit appears in the brief dialogue which follows: "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "*I am He.*"

"If any man would come after me, let him deny

himself, and *take up his cross*, and follow me (Matth. 16: 24)." Shall we wonder, when this is not ended for us by the first taking up of our cross? When for us the first battle is not decisive, and does not win the campaign? When we must learn faith and obedience by repeated wrestling? Meanwhile happy he who heeds the message: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith," the captain of our salvation, the holy help through all the struggle unto the final victory, unto repeated victory, and at last decisive victory. We gain strength through His strength to face what is hardest, to surrender our will to the Father's will, to take the cup and drink it, to *take up the cross and bear it—after Jesus*.

That most unfortunate king of France, Louis XVI, stood before his executioners. They seized his hands. He cried: "What are you doing?" and jerked his hands loose.

"We must bind you."

"Bind me? Never!" he exclaimed in kingly resistance, to such an indignity. Just then he caught the eye of the minister, who had been allowed to accompany him to the guillotine, and who said: "Sire, the Lord Jesus let Himself be bound." With that the king yielded his hands to them, saying: "You are right. His example alone enables me to bear this. I too will drink the cup to its dregs."

This *inward taking up of the cross* made it possible for Jesus later to bear the *outward cross*, and to allow Himself to be nailed to it in silence and in strength. And yet, even there once again the dark flood closes over His head, He drinks the last bitter dregs of the cup, and from His trembling lips comes the heart-rending cry: "My God, My

God, why hast *Thou forsaken Me?*" But this was the *last* trial, the last lesson in obedience. Soon the same lips cried, loud and strong: "It is finished!" And He confidently prayed: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!"

We know not what kind of hours await us. The more diligently then, and attentively, let us look unto Jesus; and especially in that last struggle, when for the last time we must learn to say: "Not as I will, Father, but as Thou wilt!"

"Then for all that wrought our pardon,
For Thy sorrows deep and sore,
For Thine anguish in the Garden,
I will thank Thee evermore;
Thank Thee with my lastest breath
For Thy sad and cruel death,
For that last "triumphant" cry
Praise Thee evermore on high."

Amen.

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD"

LAETARE; FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

PSALM 23

"Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside still water.

He restoreth my soul:

He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

Thou hast anointed my head with oil;

My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

The Lord My Shepherd Is.

The King of Love My Shepherd Is.

Saviour, Who Thy Flock art Feeding. V. 3f.

Shepherd of Tender Youth. V. 2f.

Saviour, like a Shepherd Lead Us.

I am Jesus' Little Lamb.

It was not necessary to read *this* text. Most of you could have recited it just as well from memory, or have sung it in its metrical form in the familiar hymn. For we associate the words of this psalm with a favorite melody; and thus it has become for us a real psalm, that is a song.

Many may think, that this is an easy text to preach upon! But ask any earnest preacher, and he will be most likely to tell you the very opposite. The richer and vaster the content of any Scripture passage is, the more an earnest preacher feels unable to do justice to it, and his words will be at best but a faint echo of the sacred word. For this reason he would rather let the Word of God speak for itself. So we felt before this fine old song, and we might have chosen another text, if we had not noticed the encouraging beginning of this psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd; *I shall not want.*" He always stands ready to help.

"A Psalm of David," so runs the superscription, reminding us of the youth who shepherded his father's sheep about Bethlehem, until the prophet Samuel placed a royal sceptre in his hand instead of his shepherd's crook. Then he had a whole people to shepherd, and he knew no better way to do this, than to resolve and confess: "The Lord is my Shepherd." He must help me.

"A Psalm of David," and since his day it has become the psalm of *many* a child of man! Countless lips have prayed it, numberless tongues have sung it, and many a heart has sighed these words! It has become the common property of all the children of God, as no other psalm. And yet many an individual still calls it "*his* psalm, because he finds in it the experiences of his own life, and feels in it the throb of his own heart." For these are deep and earnest experiences of which this psalm speaks. Think of the darkness into which body and soul are led, when a man walks "the valley of the shadow of death!" And of the souls ready to perish who have cried joyfully: "He restoreth

my soul!" What assurance of faith breathes in the phrase: "I shall not want!" And what perfect peace is pictured in these sayings: "Thou art with me," and, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!" May each one of us find a new measure of this peace of God today! And may it be our quiet, confident confession more and more, that,

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD: I SHALL NOT WANT!"

1. *He leads me into life's green pastures.*
2. *He leads me safely through the world's tribulations.*
3. *He hides me safely away in His House.*

"*The Lord is my Shepherd.*" The very title, "Shepherd," has something remarkably restful and soothing about it. You must agree, that when a man can say: "The Lord is my Shepherd," with all his heart, he has found his way into that mighty fortress, which enables him to add: "Whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life." (Ps. 27: 1).

And does it not put us to shame, to see a saint of the Old Testament attaining such a firm inner assurance, from merely looking up to the hand of God that rules and protects him? How much more easily and completely *we* children of the New Testament should learn this, for whom this word, "Shepherd," acquires its full meaning, as the Son of God and Man takes it upon His lips, saying: "I am the good shepherd!" (John 10: 11). And how meaningful it becomes for us in this Passion Season, when we see the Good Shepherd actually *laying down His life for His sheep!*

We call this the Silent Season of the Church Year.

Let it truly become such for us, as we ask ourselves now: "Is *my* heart still and sure like the psalmist's, as I look up to my Good Shepherd, whom he knew so little about, and I so much?" Do I hear Him calling out to this peaceless world: "Come unto Me, and to My Cross; and ye *shall* find rest for your souls!" It is only by His side that our hearts become quiet and confident. Their restless past is described in Peter's (I Pet. 2:25) saying: "For ye were (formerly) going astray like sheep;" and the happy contrast in this their present, follows at the close: "But are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1), because of the consciousness, that, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

HE LEADS ME INTO LIFE'S GREEN PASTURES

"*In green pastures,*" we read. One must needs visit the Orient to know what a fresh green oasis means in the midst of those miles of desert where no water is. How anxiously the traveler seeks such an oasis! It is a picture of our modern yearning and longing for "Good Fortune" and "Prosperity." It is significant that in our times we have so many fortune-tellers and fortune-hunters: an eloquent proof that we have not yet found the way to "better days," have hitherto sought in vain "the green pastures." Where are men seeking these today? Some seek it (and how many of them there are!) in the unbridled, unrestrained enjoyment of life; until ruined in body and soul they realize, that what they thought were the green pastures are

only poison weeds in a deadly swamp. And others (and how many of them there are) behold these green pastures beckoning them in political and social reforms, mirages and dreams of their own brains; until it is plain that these are only deceiving phantoms of the air, and that the hoped-for green pastures are as far away as ever. Still others seek these green pastures in freedom of thought and scientific investigations. And who will deny, that they find there much noble nourishment for mind and soul, until the hour comes when the earnest conviction forces itself upon them, that this tempting fare for the spirit and understanding is not a bread for the hungry heart and conscience. There is only One who dare say: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). And He is still sharing it with His people today, portioning it out to thousands in life's wilderness, and making them lie down in *green pastures*.

Are you familiar with these green pastures? 'Is the chief among them for you His living and life-giving word? Every honest heart must confess, that if the better man in us is to be nourished, and our deepest inmost needs satisfied, nothing in all the world can do this, except Jesus in His Word. Imagine all the words of Jesus taken away from human society, and you will feel the ruin that hangs over such a world. Many a one will testify, that *he himself* would have perished, utterly perished within, but for the strength imparted by this Word. Yes, how often—we appeal to you, Christian hearts—when you were ready to give up in the hardest hours of life, have you found some saying from Holy Scripture, some word from Jesus' lips, bread for the hungry and pasture in the wilderness!

And, let me remind you that these are called here "green" pastures, and *not flowery* ones. When you seek nourishment for your souls in the House of God, do not look for flowers, flowery sensational speeches, instead of wholesome food; intellectual cream-puffs instead of good solid bread; the tickling of the mind's palate instead of the nourishing of the soul. I tell you, that not a few in our great cities fall into the children's habit of "picking," and are always seeking something different, dainty, and delicate, until they are in danger of losing at last all appetite, all honest hunger for the simple good old-fashioned bread of life. *Pasturage*, not bouquets, is what the Good Shepherd offers His sheep.

"*Still waters.*" This sets us thinking now of His saying: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (John 7:37); or those other words to the woman at Jacob's Well: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. . . . Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (John 4:10-15). He, who follows this Good Shepherd will have such secret springs in his soul, from which a wonderful power flows, a strong and steady stream of life. With every prayer let down your bucket into this inexhaustible well-spring; in each Divine service drink from the bubbling spring of this Good Shepherd. When I am weary and weak, I find Him always refreshing me, and *restoring my soul*! He not only knows what pasturage His flock

needs, but how to lead them to these green fields of life:

HE LEADS ME SAFELY THROUGH THE WORLD'S
TRIBULATIONS

"He guides me in the paths of righteousness." Who among us can always find the "right path" in life, and always keep it. We long to grasp the hand of a trusty guide. And this we do with the fervent prayer: "Show me Thy ways; teach me Thy paths. Let me never wander from Thy footsteps in hours of temptation and trial. Hold me up, lest my foot slip and my soul be put to shame. Help me bear all, suffer and surrender all; but only keep me in Thy paths of righteousness." And this is the very thing He does, my beloved! Where would many of us have drifted and landed, if the unseen hand of this Good Shepherd had not held us fast in our dark hours? And what better assurance do we need, that we shall not go astray in the future and lose the right way? Oh! There is endless comfort in these few words: "He guideth me in the paths of righteousness."

And this He does, not for my name's sake, but "For his *name's sake*." It is not *my* own faithfulness upon which I rely, but *His*, who never forsakes me, and never leads me into anything which does not make for my salvation. And even when I do not understand His ways, and when they are hard ways—they are nevertheless the right ways, paths of righteousness for me. The more I keep this in mind, the more His guiding hand becomes for me a *strengthening* hand as well, and He gives me joy and strength to walk the way He appoints. He opens my eyes to see the dangerous places,

where I might fall, or where I have actually fallen down. He lifts me up again, when I fall; in short we experience what our trusty leader has sung:

"Though great our sins and sore our woes,
His grace much more aboundeth;
His helping love no limit knows,
Our utmost need it soundeth.
Our kind and faithful Shepherd, He,
Who shall at last set Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow."

Yes, even *"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."*

Do you understand the picture, before the eyes of this singer? He sees the flock winding down into the dark shadows of the mountain gorge or ravine; their path is veiled in night, they cannot see where their next step will fall; but their shepherd goes on ahead and holds up his peeled staff; and the flock which can see nothing else but that white and shining staff, are comforted and follow him contentedly—and just so is it with the Good Shepherd's comforting staff:

"Jesus, still lead on,
Till our rest be won;
Heavenly Leader, still direct us,
Still support, console, protect us,
Till we safely stand
In our fatherland."

Even though the way be hard, and run through deep shadows, who of us has not found His pilot's presence comforting in those ranges of life's voyage where all our guiding beacons were extin-

guished and black night enfolded us? Yes, *what* else have we to *hold fast to* then? I know of nothing but what the celebrated philosopher Kant attests from his deep experience: "All the books I have ever read failed to give me the comfort I derive from one single verse of the Bible: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou, Lord, *art with me.*"

And who can count the souls, who have leaned upon this saying as their staff, when all other staffs broke beneath their weight? Many have prayed these words in their last struggle, and were greatly comforted as they walked the Valley of the Shadow, with the assurance that they were not alone: "Thou art with me, guiding me by Thy Shepherd hand." Oh! Let us lay hold on this hand betimes, and surrender ourselves to its guidance! The shorter the way of life left before us, the lonelier the path, the darker the valley, the wearier our footsteps, then the more let us pray: "Let Thy staff guide me, Thy rod defend me, Thy light lead me, and Thy voice encourage me, as it cries: "Fear not! I am with Thee! My sheep shall never perish!"

He leads me safely through the world's tribulations, and now follows the third strophe in our song:

HE HIDES ME SAFELY AWAY IN HIS HOUSE

*"I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever."
"thou preparest a table before me in the presence
of mine enemies; thou hast anointed my head with
oil; my cup runneth over."*

This is the picture of a man surrounded by threatening foes, but dwelling so safely back of

strong walls and under a protecting roof, that he has anointed his head for a festal banquet, and in his hand is a brimming cup. He is happy and at rest, secure from his enemies.

In this Passion Season do not these words about a table and a cup, a feast in spite of enemies round about, gain a special meaning? Who must not think of the table for the Holy Communion which He prepared for us in that last night? Does not this verse picture the *peace of the great atonement*, in which our Saviour and Shepherd has hidden us away from our worst foes: the great accuser and our sinful guilt? And what is this brimming cup? Does He not renew unto us joyful courage for the hard struggles of our life, and let us drink in something of the power that refreshed *Him* in those hot Gethsemane hours, when He hides Himself within the Father's will, and accepted the bitter cup from His hand? Does not this psalm admonish us not to pass by this table and cup in this holy season? Luther says, as he comments on this passage: "After this fashion I have held fast to the grace of God year after year, and let my enemies continue to plot so painfully my destruction, while I sat at the table of my Lord, and joyfully sang my little (Twenty-third) psalm." In still another sense is the table of the communion an approved antidote against injury from our foes. For here I learn a great victory: how to forgive my enemies, even as I seek forgiveness for myself. By the way you abide in the peace of God in the presence of your enemies, and offer them God's peace in return for their evil, you will experience that you are dwelling in the House of the Lord.

Safe in His protection, you may then repeat:

"Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the day of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever." We are reminded here of you, dear young Christians, who are about to come to the altar in confirmation, and make your confession that the Good Shepherd is your own. Oh! Grasp His hand with all the warmth of your youthful hearts! Hold it fast in all the events of life! Never let go of it, and be sure that He will never let go of you, or forsake you in your hardest hours. His goodness and mercy shall follow you all your life long, and you shall dwell for ever under the shadow of the Almighty.

Of course, as long as we are pilgrims here, His house for us will be a *wanderer's tent*, and one through which the wind and storm sweeps. The inscription over it must be: "We have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Heb. 13: 14). Here we are *under* God's Heaven, but there we will be *in* God's Heaven, in the safe fold with its abiding peace, in the Father's House where we dwell *for ever and ever*.

"My Father's House on high,
Home of my soul! how near
At times to faith's far-seeing eye
The golden gates appear!

Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word,
And oft repeat before the throne,
'Forever with the Lord!'"

Yes, there we shall sing in far more confident tones: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

Dear friends, is this too high praise, which some one has written about our psalm: "It is the night-

ingale among the psalms, small and modest in plumage, singing timidly in the dark, and yet filling a whole forest with its melody. Blessed be the day, when this psalm was born!"

And I would add: "Blessed be the day, when it is born *in us*, in me and you! And it is born anew today, and lives anew with all its blessed sunshine wherever a man learns to say from the bottom of his heart: "Thou, Lord, shalt be *my Shepherd!*"

"My Shepherd is the Lord my God—
There is no want I know.
His flock He leads in verdant meads,
Where tranquil waters flow.

He doth restore my fainting soul
With His Divine caress;
And when I stray, He points the way
To paths of righteousness.

Yea, tho' I walk the vale of death,
What evil shall I fear?
Thy staff and rod are mine, O God;
And Thou, my Shepherd, near!

Mine enemies behold the feast
Which my dear Lord hath spread;
And, lo, my cup He filleth up;
With oil anoints my head.

Goodness and mercy shall be mine
Unto my dying day;
Then will I bide at His dear side
For ever and for aye!"

An early poem of Eugene Field.

TREASURES FOR THE LIFE OF BELIEV- ING CHRISTIANS

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT; JUDICA, OR PASSION SUNDAY

ROM. 5: 1-5

"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we also rejoice in our tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope; and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

My Faith Looks up to Thee.
Now I have Found the Ground Wherein.
We Are the Lord's: His All-sufficient Merit.
How Firm a Foundation, ye Saints of the Lord.
Jesus, Crucified for Man.
What Cheering Words Are These. V. 3f.
Peace, Perfect Peace, in this Dark World of Sin.

We stand in the midst of the Lenten Season, at the opening of the two weeks called the Passion Season, at the original beginning of Lent. Our eyes are turned to our suffering Saviour and to His Cross. We spoke of this to a man of good repute, expressing our regret that so few in these serious times of ours sought their strength from the Cross of Christ, which alone can make us stand firm and

strong amid the storms of life. He looked up in surprise, and asked: "Do you really think any special power proceeds from the Cross of Christ, and that a Christian can bear up amid the problems and struggles of life any better than other men of principle? He could see no essential difference.

The question of this man aroused us. We knew that it lies unspoken upon many other lips: "What benefit does the believer find in looking up to his crucified Lord? *What advantage does the believing Christian have over other men?* Is not, in the end, this thing we call faith a bit of wornout furniture no longer used by the modern spirit? A superfluity we could just as well do without? In short, is there any difference between a believing Christian heart and any other? Men claim they do not see it, have not discovered it."

And yet there is such a difference, wide as the heavens above us. There is something radically different in the man, who lives by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20), and in His fellowship. A real power streams out from the Christ, such as flows from no other source. He who has experienced this will add his quiet yea and amen to what we say. But it is quite another thing to account fully for this living by the help of the Christ, and to describe just *wherein* this Divine power *consists*. This is no easy question. Who is equipped to answer such spiritual questions aright? The man who wrote this Epistle, if ever any man was! He was the Saul who became Paul, changed from a despiser of Christ into a confessor of Christ, and approved for his faith in Christ above most other men, until at last he sealed this faith beneath the

executioner's sword. He knew from his own *past* just what that life amounts to, which a man lives by his own principles, and which he shaped by the law and philosophy. He is referring to this past, as in contrast to it he begins this chapter with the Word: "Now"; refers to a new state of "grace wherein we stand." And as he continues, he describes the Divine power he has now found in the Christ, the treasures for his life he has found beneath Christ's Cross. We ask eagerly what they are?

WHAT REAL TREASURES DOES THE BELIEVING
CHRISTIAN FIND FOR HIS LIFE?

The apostle points out definitely these three:

1. *Peace with God.*
2. *Hope of Future Glory.*
3. *Strength and Victory in Tribulation.*

We take up first,

PEACE

This is, and will always be, a vital question: "How can my poor restless heart find *peace*? For in itself it has no peace. It can never find peace, because that heart bears in itself the source of all our *unrest*. The cause of our unrest is the guilt of sin, a troubled conscience, and alienation from our God. Many indeed never come to a clear consciousness of what really causes their unrest. But the deeper a man delves, the more honest he is with himself, the more he will perceive that he is dissatisfied with himself; cast down by the realization of what he is, contrasted with what he could and should be. This, in the final analysis, is what burdens mankind with that strain of melancholy,

which the oldest poets have voiced in their solemn songs. And not only the ancient poets; for the poets of our days have expressed it most fully. Who is not familiar with the restless pessimism in modern poetry? Who is more distracted and unhappy, than the modern man? Any man, without communion with God, without the answer of a good conscience toward Him, without the peace of sins forgiven, is a child of unrest, whether he realizes its cause or not. And peace builds us up, while unrest—*tears down!*

How does man emerge out of restlessness *into peace*? The apostle answers confidently: "Being therefore justified *by faith*, we have peace—peace with God." And we know what kind of faith he means: that which clings to the *Cross of Christ!* For there Paul finds the Mediator between man and God, who nailed all our guilt to the cross, and with it all our unrest. There God extended to us His reconciling fatherly hand, and opened to us His merciful fatherly heart, resting upon which we may breathe freely again, free from all anxiety and that nightmare of unrest which worries, wearies, and wears out our hearts. *Of this theme* the apostle never wearies in all his Epistles; it is the heart and soul of all his preaching. You recall his words: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save *Jesus Christ, and him crucified* (I Cor. 2:2)." That, for him, is the foundation of all salvation and peace. Whoever clings to Him, the Crucified, in prayerful faith, will have His assurance: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; you have found grace with God;" "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). "Being therefore justified by faith,

we have peace with God through *our Lord Jesus Christ.*" This is, and will ever remain, the first and best treasure for the believing Christian's life: this firm, unmovable peace with God, founded upon Jesus Christ, his Lord and Saviour.

But we hear two objections. First, are there not men who seem to have peace, without this being grounded upon Christ and God. We reply: Upon what then does their peace rest? Only one thing is thinkable here: it must rest upon their own heart. But that is the very thing, which is so *peaceless* in us. That is only a seeming peace, and consists in the man's shutting his eyes, concealing his lack of peace, and deceiving himself more or less consciously. And this is only too easily done. One can deceive and belie himself about his own inner state; and therefore seek to forget his real unrest in busy labors, in distracting pleasures. He thus signs a kind of armistice with the disturber of his peace within. Or he can seek the reason for his unrest in others, and refuse to find it in himself. Then he will be much provoked at them, and pleased with himself. But this very provocation, this never satisfied disposition, this seeking after distractions, this refusal to hold still and examine himself—are not these a proof that he *has no* peace within? Alas! This *imitation peace*, which so many have—is it not the worst enemy of their *true peace*?

The *second* objection is often heard from earnestly striving Christian spirits: "I believe in Christ and His atoning cross; I am fully in earnest about laying hold upon Him by faith; but I can never come to a real abiding sense of peace. If I do so at certain times, this feeling soon leaves me,

and my soul is anchorless again." In the first place, such earnest souls have the comfort of much company in their misery. Even such a true and stalwart believer as our Luther had such peaceless times! And furthermore, the same old error confronts us here. You seek a foundation for peace, the guarantee for peace, *in yourself!* In your own *feelings* and *experiences*; while it can never be in us, but only in God, and His grace and love sealed to us through the Gospel and Cross of Christ. This peace, of which Paul speaks, is not foremost a feeling, but a *certainty*.

Picture to yourself a child walking with his father by night through a weird wood, where many a crime has been committed. His little heart will fear all manner of evils in that uncanny darkness. But he knows his father is with him, and clings to his hand, and this quiets and emboldens him. The foundation for his peace does not lie in himself, but entirely in his father and that stronger arm. He will not always *feel* this peace; on the contrary, any strange noise will set him trembling again. But then he will cling the closer to his father, hold his hand tighter; and thus in the midst of all his uneasiness he will find ease; in all his anxiety, peace, because of the certainty he has, that his father is with him, and strong enough to defend him.

What does our Saviour say to His disciples: "In the world *ye have tribulation*." This is the very opposite of the feeling of peace. And yet in the same breath He adds: "These things have I spoken unto you, that *in me ye may have peace*" (John 16:33). Only cast yourself like John upon His bosom; only hold fast as any child does to your

Father's hand; and you must be assured of His protecting grace, no matter how your heart throbs and bobs about. This very thing is the power of the Divine peace, that it does not depend upon anything which is in me, but that it is present and is mine, in spite of my sin, in spite of my weakness, in spite of my conflicting emotions. It rests on the solid ground of the grace of our God in Jesus Christ.

"I build on this foundation:
That Jesus and His blood
Alone are my salvation,
The true eternal good."

Treading this ground in faith, Paul Gerhardt sings the *true* Christian Science; a trust not in *our own hearts*, but in the *Almighty God*, songs not of *feelings* but of *faith*:

"Still heavy is thy heart?
Still sink thy spirits down
Cast off the weight, let fear depart,
And every care be gone.
What though thou rulest not,
Yet heaven and earth and hell
Proclaim: God sitteth on the throne,
And ruleth all things well."

And this *peace* is the first and best *treasure of the Christian's life*. For this reason we have dwelt longer upon it, than upon the next two things our Epistle points out. Beside this peace with God we have,

THE HOPE OF FUTURE GLORY

"We rejoice in *hope of the glory* of God."

The peace of God, dear friends, is an inward, invisible possession. One must look deep into the eye

and heart of a man, to know whether he has this peace or not. Outwardly the men who have it have no advantage over those who have it not. I mean, they are no better off in a worldly way. In fact, from a worldly standpoint, we may say they are worse off. The way of the worldling is broad. When he seeks pleasure, he can go where he will, and join with any who please him. But a believing Christian can only go, where his Lord goes with him, and his peace with God is not imperiled.

The way of the worldling is broad. When he is in need and trouble, he has all sorts of ways and means of helping himself; and he does not consider long, whether these are right ways and honest means.

The way of the worldling is broad. If he is rich and has this world's goods, he can do with these what he will. But a believing Christian can not; he knows that his goods are not his, but God's, and he must one day give account to God for their proper use.

Indeed, even in an inward sense, the way of the worldling is broad. When he sins, he feels little distress about it, or none at all; but goes on in his way with his make-believe peace. The believing Christian sins too, and even when he wages war against his old man he suffers defeat. This troubles his heart, and costs him many a bitter tear before God. What must we conclude from this comparison? If men had only *this present life*—you know Paul's words: If we have only hoped in Christ in *this* life, we are of all men most pitiable (I Cor. 15: 19). But for the Christian there stands back of this world still another, *the world to come*. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

And with this we come to a thing, which can not be too strongly emphasized in our days. There is nothing which the modern spirit hates and opposes, so much as this hope of the life beyond, this Christian faith in the future glory God will give us. Sometimes they mock it rudely, as a "Heaven for Fools and Sparrows." Again they politely shrug their shoulders in silence. At any rate the faith of thousands today in eternity and judgment is shattered. That is why they chase so greedily after riches and pleasures in *this* life. This is the cause of their poisonous envy for all upon whom a greater fortune has smiled; and of their unbelieving despair, which often makes an end of life when according to such a standard it is no more worth living. Over against this we cannot stress too strongly the value of life to a believing Christian, who, no matter what the present holds for him, knows that the best part of his life awaits him as an inheritance reserved for him in heaven. With this assurance Christianity stands or falls. Take this certainty out of the lives of the apostles, out of our Saviour's life; tear out every page of the New Testament which speaks of this, and you will not have one single leaf left.

So, fortify your hearts against this misleading spirit of our age, though garbed as an angel of light; and meet it with the well-armed confidence of a Paul: "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Though our way as pilgrims through time be narrow and hard, we revive as we think of the future glory God will give us. It does not now appear what this glory will be, and what *we* will be in it (I John 2:2), but we know "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with

the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward" (Rom. 8:18). God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Rev. 7:17). Yes, even those bitterest tears, that flow because of our sins, will then have an end. There will be no more sin; but only love and purity; righteousness and peace shall kiss one another.

This is the glory and blessedness for which we wait; and meanwhile it behooves us to be faithful unto death beneath the burdens and sorrows of life. And this brings us to our third treasure, which only the believing Christian possesses:

STRENGTH AND VICTORY IN TRIBULATION

"And not only so," the apostle closes. Not only in the future do we hope for great and glorious things, but already in the present we find much comfort amid our tribulations. Paul even says: "We *rejoice* in (or over) our tribulations." That is a noble saying. The natural man is quite content, and proud of himself, when he bears his troubles silently. That is hard enough for him to do. Most often he complains about his misfortunes and rattles his chains impatiently. Or he may keep quiet, and *seem resigned*. But there is a way of doing this, which is nothing but stupid stoicism. It does not murmur, but neither does it pray; it only says apathetically: "Let it come as it will, there must be an end of it some day." That looks like resignation, and yet is far from being the real thing. He who is *really resigned*, resigns soul and body humbly to the will of God. He says in his heart: "God will not suffer me to be tempted and burdened above what I can bear" (I Cor. 10:13). He holds fast in hope and prayer to God's fatherly

hand, even when it smites him. He sees His love, and trusts it, even when His face is turned away. He knows that God is faithful, and his soul finds its strength in quietness and confidence before God (Isa. 30: 15).

Is not this *strength and victory in tribulation*, when we bear the cross with such quiet resignation learned beneath the cross of our Lord? And yet there is much more to learn. The apostle would have us *rejoice* in tribulation. That is more than merely not murmuring, more than silent surrender. It includes a joyous thanksgiving in our troubles, and for them. He would have us rise to such a level, and, praise God! there are many souls whom God has led to just *such a victory* over their troubles. Only the other day we were impressed, as one who was visited with a great affliction spoke to us of all the blessings which remained to him, and of how trust in God had not been shaken out of his soul. And there are surely many seated here in our midst, who rejoice and thank God quietly for eternal blessings, which they have garnered from their troubles.

Now the apostle speaks more exactly of what these are; but we can only follow him briefly. *Tribulation worketh*, or trains us up in *steadfastness* (A. V. patience). And this worketh *approvedness* (experience). Yes these bring us experiences for the heart and life, we would otherwise never have had. We experience how in tribulation there lies a secret blessing; that the more strength we need to bear things, the more is given us in a wonderful way; that when our need is greatest, our deliverance is nearest at hand; that we have learned to look with very different eyes upon our-


selves, our children, and all the things of this world. And, "*approvedness brings hope.*" When we have experienced how God helps us out of six troubles, we can believe and hope He will not forsake us in the seventh (Job. 5:19). He who can say: "Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us" (I Sam. 7:12), will soon learn to sing:

"If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength, whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days."

For, "*Hope putteth not to shame.*" This saying has become a proverb in the lips of our people, and is applied to *all hope*, without any distinctions. How strange this is, in view of the fact that so many hopes in our lives are actually put to shame. We have even learned to say: "Let us live in hope, even if we die in despair," Such fond, foolish hoping may cheer us, may buoy us up; but we cannot say unconditionally of that kind of hope, that it will not put us to shame. Many a one has been made ashamed by the false hopes, upon which he built his life. Only *one* hope will never put us to shame: that hope of the believing Christian in the living God and His grace. With Him our way leads, no matter what happens, through night to light, and through the cross to the crown; and when the light of these earthly will-o-the-wisps goes out for the Christian, the star of eternal hope will only shine the brighter, and shine unto the perfect day. For his hope is the morning star of the day of glory dawning for him in Jesus Christ. He will refresh us with the water of life eternal, wipe away all our tears. Who can number all the

good things He has prepared for them who love
and trust Him!

“What cheering words are these!
Their sweetness who can tell?
In time and to Eternity
’Tis with the righteous well.”
Amen.



ECCE HOMO!

PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 19: 1-5

"Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple garment; and they came unto him, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands. And Pilate went out again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him out to you, that ye may know that I find no crime in him. Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold, the man!"

SUGGESTED HYMNS

All Glory, Laud, and Honor.

My Lord, My Father, at Thy Feet Adoring. V. 4.

Joy to the World! the Lord is Come. V. 3f.

Art thou Weary, art thou Languid? V. 3.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. V. 3.

O Jesus, Thou art Standing. V. 2.

The Head that Once was Crowned with Thorns.

O Perfect Life of Love. Vs. 3-5.

O Come and Mourn with me Awhile. V. 3.

One picture from that whole group of impressive scenes, in which our Suffering Saviour appears before our eyes! But one, which before all others should leave its impress upon the soul of the Christian congregation! Like the picture of "Jesus in Gethsemane," and of "Jesus on the Cross," such is this one of "*Jesus in the purple garment with the crown of thorns.*"

Master painters have portrayed it reverently,

and master musicians have sung of it in touching cadences. In one of our Berlin churches it stood before the assembled congregation as a silent sermon, where in the picture over the altar it said: "Behold, the man! Or, as the more familiar Latin expresses it:

ECCE HOMO!

Let us heed, and "*Behold!*" with thoughtful and prayerful hearts!

The question arises first of all: "What did Pilate, he who spoke these memorable words, mean by them?"

Let us recall what happened beforehand. Against his conscience and out of the fear of man, he yielded in a measure to the importunities of the people, and ordered Jesus to be scourged. This the soldiers did in the painful, horrid way of the Romans. They took off His clothes, and bound Him to a stake. After the cruel scourging, they led Him, bleeding to the washroom, but instead of putting His own clothes on Him again, they added insult to injury; calling their comrades together for a spectacle, and staging the mock ceremony of a *coronation*. They had heard Jesus say before Pilate: "I am a King," and so they now array Him as a carnival king. Since He is a king, He must wear the chief insignia of royalty: firstly, a garment of royal purple—and so they throw about Him a worn-out red military mantle. Again He must have a sceptre—so they thrust a reed pole from the washroom in His hand. Finally, He must have a crown—they break off branches from the thorn bush, weave them into a crown, and press this down upon His head. Yes, they snatch the pole from His hand, and smite the

thorns deep into His holy forehead. It is *thus*, that Jesus appears, when summoned by Pilate, and brought out from the inner court through the portal of the Prætorium before the assembled people: "Wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment." This is what makes Pilate exclaim in an impulse of pity, and in the hope of awakening the people's pity: "Behold, the man!" "See what a poor pitiable fellow He is, sorely punished, punished already more than enough!"

So speaks Pilate, whose heart has been enlightened by only a few rays of the glory dwelling in the Christ. And we, who know unspeakably more than this heathen Roman—does no pity touch and move us? Can we behold Him in this picture without feeling—and especially in this Passion Season—that it is not we so much who look at this picture, but that this picture looks at us, and asks:

"This have I done for thee;
What hast thou done for Me?"

And once again—may God preserve us from this mere *pity of a Pilate!* There is a kind of sympathy for our Lord, an apparent going out of the heart to Him, which is far from really giving our hearts to Him. Yes, there is a pity, which is at the bottom—contempt. So it was with the Roman governor. To him this poor fellow seems too harmless to be an object of hatred: only an amiable enthusiast for whom one must feel pity. And are there not many today, who stand in this very attitude toward the Christ? They would not do Him harm, but He does not know this world, and therefore goes on to certain shipwreck. They pity Him

for His fate, for His visionary ideals. And just so do they view His followers, shrugging their shoulders in pity over them, as nice harmless persons, good and useful in many ways, but sadly behind hand in the wisdom of this world. This pity too is only a poorly veiled disrespect, a real contempt. This proud kind of Pilate-pity paved the way to his final full consent to the, "Crucify Him!" And it is as pitiless and cruel today.

But, to return to our theme: "Behold, the man!"

This saying of Pilate reminds us of many another, which some poet, ruler, or plain person has uttered, and which God interprets. To many of the simplest sayings of men God has added a wider application and a mightier truth, than the man ever dreamt of, who spoke them. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so God's thoughts are higher than men's (Isa. 55:9), even when we are only dealing with words. Caiaphas, the Jewish judge and high priest, prophesied without knowing it, when he gave that counsel: "It is expedient for you that *one* man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not (John 11:50)." And the Pharisees, in their hatred, unconsciously gave voice to the Gospel's greatest comfort: "This man receiveth sinners (Luke 15:2)." And just so Pilate has no presentiment of prophecy, dreams not that behind him stands another, and speaks in quite a different sense as He points us to this picture: "Behold, *the man!*"

What is this, O man, but *thine own picture, the portrait of our whole race* in all its misery and suffering, which confronts us in *this* man? If you ask: "What is man?" behold him, weary from struggling and suffering, bound hand and foot, in

so many ways wounded without and within, envied, hated, and smitten by his own brethren, a servant of servants, a child of tears and death: *that is what man is*, that and nothing else!

According to God's Creator-plan man was to have been a *king*, full of royal power and peace. And a king he still is, in spite of his chains and servitude; for he bears within himself a consciousness of his kingly calling. But this only makes his fate the more bitter: to know he was born a king, and yet has become a beggar. How more sharp is the irony of it: to be a king with a crown, but a crown of thorns; in purple, but a purple garment that is soiled and torn, so that he stands forth, not in honored array, but in wretched rags!

And, Christian friends, do you not feel a mysterious connection here, between the thorns, which grew on the earth when God cursed it for man's sin, and these about His head who came to redeem us from the curse of sin? And whether these thorns grow upon the field of the farmer, or in the pleasure-gardens of the rich; whether we think of an emperor's heavy crown, or of the hard lot of the poor peasant—yet these are thorns we all wear, and through which we must make our way. The only difference is, that our Redeemer wears them openly and honestly and we seek to gild them, and weave roses among them. All these honors and pleasures of the world, what else are they at the bottom, but this purple garment thrown over our shoulders, to hide the stripes sin and misery have laid upon us; a make-believe robe which will soon be torn from us, as from our Lord Jesus, when the time comes to go out and die. Yes, this throws a gloomy light upon that saying: "Behold, the man,"

the man in whom all mankind stands before us pictured in its misery!

But how came He to be the picture and spectacle of the curse upon our race? Lord Jesus, Thou pure and righteous one, who went about doing good everywhere, why this mocking and hatred for Thee? Why this sharp crown of thorns as the reward for Thy love? Still sadder are our eyes, and deeper is our horror, when we answer this question. We know who made Him such an object of scorn. Plato, the wise old Greek, told us, and it sounds almost like sacred prophecy: "When the perfectly righteous man appears on earth, men will bind him to a stake and put out his eyes; they will nail him to a cross." And when He came, this Righteous One, this King's Son from Heaven, and stood before the enthroned kings of earth, this Pilate had no rest until he sent Him to such a fate. Pilate despised his own Saviour; he laid on Him his own curse, and sent Him out to a martyr-death. "Behold, the man!" Even to such lengths can man go, to the last limits of possible sinning!

All that mankind have done of evil and horror, *behold* it here in *one* picture sharply drawn! Behold thyself here, and tremble, O man, for this is man's work. Each and all of us have helped to make this portrait: the faithless disciples, the traitor Judas, the hypocrite Caiaphas, the weakling Pilate, Jews and Gentiles, you and me! And are they not still among us today: Pilates who with a shrug of the shoulder say: "What is truth?" Caiaphases who deem any end holy which fits their plans, even murder? People who cry, Hosanna, to-day; and tomorrow, Crucify Him? Judases who barter away what is most holy, God and con-

science, for filthy lucre? Peters who no longer know this dear Jesus, when they sit about a comfortable fire with worldly company? It is not *one* man, some man, who is pictured here, but *the* man, all men. All bear within themselves such an abyss of sin, as this into which we are gazing now!

All men, did we say? Yet not all. Among all these sinful, there is one mysterious and noble exception. And who is He? "Behold, the man!" He who stands here before Pilate!

Already as a lad in the temple He calls forth our admiration. It is as though we read upon the forehead of that twelve-year-old youth in God's handwriting: "Behold, the man! The man I have chosen, and in whom I am well pleased!" Then later He goes about teaching and working miracles of love from town to town. His disciples follow Him, and refuse to leave Him. What is there in Him, which draws them to Him as to a Heavenly magnet; and again which drives others from Him, as they would flee from the judgment of God? Behold the man, from whom proceeds an atmosphere of divinity, the spirit of God, as from no other. And even in His pitiful passion appearance this is true. Pilate is manifestly troubled, not only by the greatness of His sufferings, but by the greatness of the *sufferer*, the purity and holiness of His agonized countenance. It forces from this indifferent fellow the declaration: "I find no crime (fault) in Him (John 18:38). It fills him with a strange foreboding, when his wife entreats: "Have thou nothing to do with (against) that righteous man (Matth. 27:19)." This was He who could so majestically demand of those envious Pharisees, fairly foaming at the mouth with rage:

"Which of you convicteth me of sin?" He, of whom Judas testified: "I have betrayed the innocent blood!" He, who while His disciples prayed in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses," needed not pray for any guilt of *His own*, because He was always obedient to His Father in Heaven, and walked with unerring truth the way through thorns and blood His Father appointed Him. And this He did, although not without many a bitter struggle; with the tempter, and with His own flesh and blood. Think of His wrestling in Gethsemane! Recall what the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "Though he was a Son (of God), yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (5:8).

And beside this holy obedience there stands a holy love, such as the world has never seen, or dreamed of. For Peter, who denied Him, this love has its recalling heart-rending look; and even at a Judas-heart it knocks once more, before it is too late: "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" It offers salvation to weak and worldly Pilate himself: "He that is of the truth heareth my voice." For the penitent thief on the cross it opens the gates of Paradise. For His murderers it prays: "Father forgive them!"

Yes, behold the man! Is this not a man, such as all *men should be, after the will of their creator?* The man with the image of God, true and clean? The holy and god-like man, whom the world has sought since Adam's fall, and never found? Behold Him, who is the Son of Man, or future head of our race; Him whom Paul calls: "The second or last Adam (I Cor. 15:45)." How did this unique character come about, among the thousands and millions of sinners, this one pure, holy, and

perfect man? Either we must openly deny the fact of His sinlessness, and thus give up Jesus Himself; or we must unlock this mystery with that one key Holy Scripture gives us: "Son of *God* and Son of *Man*."

If we accept this only reasonable alternative, then "God was in Christ," and set Him down amid our sinful race to break off that dreadful succession of sinners down from Adam, and to be the head of a new kind of holy house and family in our human race. Ask Him why He walks this gloomy way of unmerited suffering? Why He wears the crown of thorns and bears the cross? Here too we must despair of finding any solution, unless we grasp the key which Scripture gives us: "God made him, who knew no sin, to be *sin on our behalf* (II Cor. 5: 21);" "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes *we are healed* (Isa. 53: 5)." And for this reason these pictures of His Passion are the part of His life story, for which we can accept no substitute. It is in this form of the "Head once crowned with thorns," that He has conquered the world. Thus only is He our *Saviour* and *Redeemer*. That cross is His royal throne, and that crown of thorns His diadem. "Behold, the man!"

And if before we were horror-stricken at the thought, that man is here pictured in the extreme limits of his sinning, we may now breathe more freely, and say: "Behold, the man!" For in Jesus we have also the *highest goal of man*. This, that He was, is *what men are to be*!

And through Jesus we can become such as was He. For this reason we call Him our *Redeemer*. This miraculous change is possible through the

power which proceeds from Him. And who has not experienced something of this? Our conscience feels this power as we merely glance at Him, and especially in His passion pictures. Every sin in us is hopelessly *condemned* by one such look at Him; before that head crowned with thorns nothing unclean can stand.

And again, from that "sacred head now wounded," what *healing* proceeds, what help and comfort for the penitent soul. It says silently but loudly, "Fear not! I have borne your griefs and sorrows. I was wounded for your sakes, that *your* wounds might be healed." And when that inspiring look of the thorn-crowned One falls upon us, it wakes in us the response: "I will nail myself to the cross with Thee, and renounce those things for which my weak flesh lusts. What Thine eyes hate, I will flee and forsake, as much as in me lies." And thus we feel the transforming power of the Crucified, and how He is calling and drawing, loving and lifting us into the likeness of His image (II Cor. 3:18), into the desire to be like Him. And we feel how each look from Him, each word of His, continues to admonish us: "Behold the man," the man *pleasing unto God*, the final goal we can and must reach.

So felt the apostles, and with them all the disciples of Christ through all the ages. All that is good and great in them is nothing else, but this reflection and image of Him. And when they followed Him in martyrdom, as for instance John Hus whom they led to the stake with a paper crown covered with devils, this only reminded them of their Saviour's crown of thorns, and strengthened and comforted them in their death.

Let *us* be more diligent in remembering our Saviour as He appeared before Pilate, and stand still before this noble figure, and grow still and steadfast in the unrest of our times and of our hearts, whispering to ourselves: "Behold, the man!"

Child of man, when you think to trifle with sin, and are about to defile the image of God in you, may this man with the crown of thorns and the blood-stained garment rise up before you, and say in this sense: "Behold, the man!" And when hatred and revenge are roused within you under the scourge and the thorns with which men afflict you, may that silent figure before Pilate put you to shame: "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (I Peter 2: 23)." When all manner of sufferings oppress you, and you hear sneering voices say: "Behold the man you are, forsaken by God and man!" then look up to this martyr-figure, consider His resignation and patience, who said: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," and: "I am not alone, but it is I and the Father; the Father is with Me!"

And when you see some one despised and forsaken, poor and sick in body or soul, so that you are tempted to say in idle pity: "Behold, the man!" may God help you to recognize in him the features of your suffering Saviour, and not to pass him by, ashamed of the least of these His brethren! And when one day we come to die, God grant this comfort may still be ours, and that we may still "behold the man," who wore for us the crown of thorns and the purple garment; until with Him we leave far behind us the thorn and scorn of earth's misery, and there above He dries all our tears, and decks

us with the crown of life and the white robes of Heaven; and we stand lost in wonder, love, and praise, at the fulfillment of His promise, that "we shall be like Him;" and exclaim with worshipping angels: "*Behold* the man, the redeemed of the Lord, redeemed through Him who was made man, *The man for Us!*" Amen.

AN ADDRESS PREPARATORY TO THE COMMUNION

HOLY THURSDAY

"O dear memorial of that Death
Which still survives, and gives us breath!
Live ever, Bread of Life, and be
My food, my joy, my all to me!"

I COR. 11: 26

"This do in remembrance of Me!" This was the last hallowed wish of our Saviour, before He went out to die. And we have assembled to fulfill what He wished, to remember Him in the Holy Supper. When is this more fitting for us, than on this never-to-be-forgotten day, when He instituted the Holy Sacrament, as He last met with His disciples? But *how* shall we do it after the mind of our Lord? I seem to see over each celebration of the communion in this Silent Week, just *one* inscription in burning letters. And may it become a holy flame in our hearts in this hour: "*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he come.*"

SUGGESTED HYMNS

O Sacred Head, now Wounded. V. 3.
Ah, Holy Jesus, how hast Thou Offended. V. 2.
My Lord, My Master, at Thy Feet Adoring.
Jesus, Refuge of the Weary. V. 2.
O Perfect Life of Love. V. 4f.

This Holy Meal itself proclaims His death. It speaks in a silent sign language of nothing else but His death on the cross. The broken bread speaks of His heart that broke in death; the wine poured into the cup of the blood poured out for us. The whole celebration is simply a visible reminder of

Good Friday, a repeated *proclamation of His death*, which goes on from generation to generation—*until He comes again*.

But of course the words of the apostle say more, much more than this. He expects *those*, who *celebrate* this supper, to proclaim Christ's death. At other times the congregation here in the house of God is divided into two parts: the minister who *proclaims*, and the audience of members who *hear* the proclamation. Not so is it with this holy sacrament. Here, all who take part are to proclaim Christ and His death; and the celebration of the communion is to be our solemn *confession of Christ's death*. Have you come, beloved, to make this confession again, of Jesus and His Cross? We ought to be the more faithful in every hour of communion to renew our promise: "Though all others are false, yet will I be true to Thee!" For many are busy in our days in proclaiming the death of Christ and His Church in a very different way. The poet mourns, because Christ has died, and is forgotten by so many of those who bear His name, forgotten as long as they live. He weeps, because Christ was so full of love and did so much for us; and yet for many is now so dead a Christ that they never give Him a thought!" But we, as often as we eat this bread, and drink the cup, will confess Thee as our crucified Saviour, will proclaim Thee and Thy death!

What we confess our hearts know and feel. On this Holy Thursday evening, as our Saviour looked forward to the dark deeds of Good Friday, He said to His captors: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness (Luke 22:53)." We recall it with shuddering. And yet it all came forth out of

the abyss we bear in ourselves; I too, *I and my sins, share* this judgment on Golgotha. All that is *evil* in us finds here its deepest condemnation, as we behold this pure and Holy One upon the cross. And He beholds us also—where, I ask, does He look at us with more of sorrowful rebuke, than in these pictures of His Passion? Where does He put us more to shame, than as we see Him here praying, silent before those who revile Him, asking forgiveness even for His enemies, and obedient even unto the bitterness of death? For, when we behold ourselves; how much stubbornness there is which will not bend the knee; how much self-satisfaction that will not pray; how much coldness that will not love; how much proud sensitiveness that will not forgive; and how much quarreling and murmuring that will not be quiet and trust obediently in God! Does this cause us no sorrow? It should call forth a two-fold sorrow to think, that our Lord must behold such things in *us*, who wish to be reckoned His disciples. Every trifling with sin He sees in us, each denial of Him, each despising His, “Learn of Me”—what are these but thorns which wound Him deepest, because they come from His own followers, drops of blood we have made Him sweat? Let us keep in remembrance these things, when we come to His altar, and sorrow over ourselves with godly sorrow. It is with such penitent remembrance of *our sin and guilt*, that we confess Christ and Him crucified!

But we should also come with that confident, thankful confession, with which the apostle always proclaimed the Lord’s death, as the well-spring of *atonement* and all our consolation. That gift ought to be most meaningful for us, which our

Lord puts in the foreground as the chief fruit of His death on the cross. The fewer words He uses to state it, the more significant they should be to us. I mean the words: "*For the remission of sins.*" "Given and shed for you, for the remission of sins." What a comfort this is, to begin with, that my sins do not exclude me from the sacrament. On the contrary they drive me to it, to this supper expressly instituted for sinners! But, of course, only for such as are in earnest about their sins, and therefore are deeply concerned about their "remission." To such the Lord expressly proclaims His fruitful, peace-bringing death; and now the apostle charges *us* to proclaim it in every celebration of the Eucharist with thankful praise. In other services we *hear* the proclamation: "His sufferings and death deliver us from our guilt and need." But the special feature of the sacrament is that in it *we ourselves* "proclaim," testify, and bear witness: "I know in whom I have believed, and who is my refuge and redeemer." Thus do we proclaim Him, who died that we might have peace, who forgives our sins and covers our transgressions, who holds us fast with His pierced hands and will not let us go, who loves and uplifts us even where we think we must fall with our feeble strength."

And again, the distinctive feature of this hour of communion is, that He does not merely *say* through His word He will pardon me, but He *seals* this pardon to me with His sacramental pledges. He bids me "take and eat;" He makes me a partaker of His finished redemption through the gift of His glorified body, and of His new covenant with its never-failing grace through His blood. With

these pledges the sacrament actually becomes what the Scripture says: a union with Him in the *likeness of His death*, which shall grow into a partnership with Him also in the *likeness of His life* (Rom. 6:5), that wonderful life which rises above all death.

Does He not point out this life-giving side of the sacrament by the very symbolism of the earthly elements He chose? Must not the bread and wine have reminded the disciples of those memorable words He spoke before: "I am the bread of life, the true bread out of Heaven (John 6:32 and 35)." "I am the vine, ye are the branches (John 15:5)." That was the final goal of His redemptive work, to give *Himself* to His followers as their soul-nourishing bread, to pour His Divine powers into them as the vine does its strength into the branches. And when would He desire to do this more, than in this last supper, when as the disciples looked on deeply touched, He took so solemnly the bread and the cup with the fruit of the vine, and gave it to them! He chose His last hour with them, when He heartily desired to leave them the assurance, that even when He was lifted up to Heaven, there would still continue His most intimate "*being with them always*," full provision for their hungry souls, and the powers of an endless life from above.

Now look again at the apostle's saying: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he come." We proclaim Him through the power with which His death *works in us*. His death must always be the death-blow for *my* sinful old man; His suffering because of my sin, will not suffer me to find any pleasure in sin. Where in my weakness I fall into sin, it

now becomes for *me* a painful experience. I no longer *practice* sin, but I *suffer* sin, with the oft repeated cry: "Help, Lord; help me against myself!"

And in still other ways my dying Lord inspires me, and makes me the *proclaimer of the power of His Death*. I think of how He *loved* me even unto death, and *His* love teaches *me* to love, and to love more, and more as He loved with a holy love. His love was manifested in *forgiveness*, spoken even with dying lips. So, whatever of old grudges, and implacable lovelessness dwells in my heart must be banished. In view of our dying Lord, who "died that we might be forgiven," all that unforgiving spirit must die out in our souls. This too belongs to our proclaiming His death, that we should root out these things before His altar, that we slay them as we remember His death.

And a fine old hymn verse, that prays we may love as He loved us, also prays we may *suffer* with His patience and obedience even unto death. In this way also we proclaim the power of His death, when this power works in us, so that the hardest trials cannot drive us from Him; so that though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, His rod and staff comfort me; so that the Lord is my shepherd, and I do not want, because I find comfort, protection, and salvation in Him; and because He helps me stand fast, struggle on, and bear it all unto the end!

Yea, holy, Heavenly Lord, may my whole *life* be thus a *proclamation of Thy Death*, an uninterrupted living *confession of Thee*, until Thou comest comest to call me to Thy Marriage Supper in Heaven! Amen.

THE ART OF A BLESSED DEATH

GOOD FRIDAY. 1884.

"Be near when I am dying;
O! Show Thy Cross to me;
Lord, on Thy help relying
Come Thou and set me free."

LUKE 23: 42f

"And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in Thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, Tomorrow shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Day of Wrath! that Day of Mourning. V. 7.
O Sacred Head, Now Wounded. V. 3f.
Ah, Holy Jesus, how hast Thou Offended. V. 5.
Alas! and did My Saviour Bleed. V. 5.
O Perfect Life of Love. V. 4f.
Lord, Thy death and Passion Give. V. 3f.
Jesus, Refuge of the Weary. V. 2f.

We stand beneath the cross of the dying Redeemer. What a wonderful power proceeds from it to men! That man, who dies by Jesus' side, dies . . . a blessed death. Do you think he was the only one? In our minds there lingers the solemn service, held in this church, when the aged and revered shepherd of this flock (Dr. Frederick Ahlfeld, pastor emeritus of St. Nicholas), who preached to us thirty years from this pulpit, preached to us for the last time from his coffin.

And of what did he preach? Of the art of a blessed death!

Who knows on what forehead in this assembly the messenger of death has set his seal, as the next one to be summoned? "In the midst of life we are in death." Who does not desire a *blessed* end?

So let us learn from this dying pastor, whose life closed on earth with the prayer: "And bring us, Lord, to Paradise"; learn from the dying thief, who went into eternity, clinging to that comfortable promise of Jesus: "Tomorrow shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Let us learn—and what will it avail man to learn all else, if he has not learned this? . . . let us learn,

THE ART OF A BLESSED DEATH

1. *Dying with the Penitent's Prayer,*
2. *Dying with the Penitent's Promise,* for that is indeed a blessed death.

I. THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT THIEF

Before us stands the cross on Golgotha, which in this hour is a death-bed. And while the Redeemer of the world by *His* death creates and reveals the possibility of a blessed death, another soul meanwhile walks this way, whose signboard bids all men: "Follow Me!"

Who is this lonely soul on Golgotha, who, while all the rest mock, *prays*? While others heap sin upon sin, who is this that repents of his sins? While believers are silent, a Peter denies Him, and the disciples flee, who is this that makes his bold and believing confession; the first confession of the cross by a dying man, the first victory over death through the cross?

The church-fathers gave the name of *Dismas* to this malefactor at Christ's right hand, who alone amid all the scorn of the multitude prays: "*Remember me when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom!*" Who does not catch the two-fold meaning here, as in Ps. 25:7:

"Remember not the sins of my youth
Remember me for thy mercies' sake."

First, he begs: "*Remember not my sins!*" For did not he just say to his mocking companion on the left: "Dost thou not even fear God?" Behold in these words the beginning of a sinner's salvation: the awakening conscience, the thought of the holy, living God! "Do you not even fear Him, before whom you will stand in a few minutes for judgment?" His own bones tremble at the thought, and he continues: "Thou art in the same condemnation. And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds!" A gloomy fate has befallen him, and a darker one awaits him over there—but he says: "I have deserved it." That much he knows. He does not minimize his sin, does not seek to excuse himself. He does not blame other men, or the circumstances; but takes upon himself the full guilt which is his. And he does not merely *know* his sin; he acknowledges it openly and honestly before those who stand about his cross, and before the Most High who sits enthroned above his head. Mark in all this the gate through which alone runs the way to a blessed death. "Straight is the gate"—the gate is called *Penitence!*

But can we think of a death-bed *without* repentance? Must not the fear of God shatter every soul, which is about to appear before His face?

When will there be room for that cry: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" if not when He stands at the door, ready to judge us according to the deeds done in the body! How distressing it is to enter a sickroom, where there is nothing of this penitence! How awful that self-righteousness, which even beneath the hand that humbles us, knows nothing else, but the complaint: "*How* have I deserved this?" Or that, standing on the threshold of eternity, can say: "I have no regrets!" Or, biting his lips, says with the malefactor on the left: "If He be the Christ, let Him help me!" "If there is a God, why does He leave me in this misery?" You know, my Christian friend, that this sort of talk is here definitely called: "*Blasphemy!*"

But if the *knowledge* of sin is rare even on a dying bed, the *acknowledging* of it is still more rare. How few there are, who desire to make private confession and receive absolution? Who even confess the wrongs done their fellow men, and desire their forgiveness? And yet, how many a one—we speak from sad experience—would die more peacefully, yea, would die a different death, if he would only let us help him to a confession, freeing him from his guilt and reconciling him to God? We can testify from a joyful experience, that peace has come into many a dying heart, when the things which lay like a nightmare there, have been cast off from it in confession. Then the pastor can take leave from a shining face with a grateful look!

Well do we know also that godless speech, which justifies its own impenitence, and attributes the penitence of the thief to the *greatness* of his guilt. Who does not know that this is the spirit of the wretched Pharisee, and that the purer the heart

the more tender and troubled is the conscience? Here is a dear little child, who wonders whether the dear Lord will let him enter heaven, because he once took something secretly. And there is a soul, proud and confident in the face of death, when his whole life has been full of vanity, falsehood, and contempt for God!

Though you may outshine many a malefactor in your virtues, child of man, dare you say before the holy God, that this thief on the cross was a greater sinner than you? Are you sure, that among the evil deeds and desires of your heart, all naked and open before Him with whom we have to deal, there is none that will weigh heavier in the scales of Divine Judgment than this poor misguided fellow's sin? That thief calls out to us all: "Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?"

And now he turns in entreaty to "The Sacred Head now Wounded," beside him, and says: "Lord (so A. V. and German), *remember me* when thou comest in thy Kingdom!" His penitence becomes a prayer; out of his repentance springs saving *faith*. And what a faith it was! He does not ask for bodily deliverance in this world, but for the salvation of his soul in a world to come. For him there is another world, and at this moment—*only* that other world.

So, while he is in this world, he looks to Jesus, and calls Him, "*Lord*." He does not call Him, "Rabbi," or "Master," but "*Lord*." In the revised version it is even "Jesus," which means "Saviour." "Tell us, robber," says Augustine, "where is the crown, sceptre, and purple, that you call Him, Lord? How did you learn that this man with the crown of

thorns and the pierced hands is a 'Lord,' and that He has a 'kingdom?' Perhaps what he once heard Jesus preach has revived in his memory: 'Repent ye, for the *kingdom of heaven* is nigh at hand!' Perhaps he stood as a criminal in the Prætorium, when Jesus said before Pilate: "I am a king. My *kingdom* is not of this world!" But certainly, the impressive sight of our dying Lord, and the royal pardon of that prayer still ringing in his ears: "Father forgive them!" have worked like a magnet upon his heart. And with the earnestness of his last hour, with death so close at hand, his faith ripens faster than we can explain. We too sometimes change, grow, and ripen more in *one decisive hour* of our lives, than in many long years. And beside all this, there is that wonderful inscription over the cross of Jesus, which no one else understood: "Jesus of Nazareth, the *King* of the Jews." A presentiment of its full meaning flashes upon this penitent thief, and he sees Him coming, as He told His enemies He would; a king "in the clouds of heaven and with great power," to claim His kingdom. He thinks: "Oh! How blessed, if He would count me in among His followers!" He exclaims: "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy Kingdom!"

And you, Christian friends, do not your hearts cry out: "Remember me, *also me!*" When my last hour comes, and yours, to whom will we cling amid the floods of death, if not to Him who has redeemed us as our king, and secured and delivered us from all evil by His blood shed on the cross? Have you seen that picture? A ship has been wrecked and has sunk. Out of the waves the sunburnt hand of a sailor is lifted, who grasps in utter despair at the

floating wreckage, but in vain! These poor sticks sink beneath his hand. Then there is a second figure, emerging from the sea in garments of light, and clinging softly to a cross-shaped rock, which rises out of the waves. It signifies that faith, which lays hold on the Cross, and is saved by the Cross! And when we think of the hour, when all earthly things will sink away beneath our feet, shall we not cry: "Lord, remember me!" For Jesus, the crucified, is our only helper in that last hour of need. He alone can set me in His Kingdom, and make me like unto the angels. Will He do this? Listen to the

PROMISE FOR THE PENITENT THIEF

"Lord," the dying thief had prayed; and the Lord makes answer. Fully conscious that He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father, the only mediator between God and man, He turns His wounded, thorn-crowned head toward the poor pleader, and utters that royal word: "*Verily* (literally it is our 'Amen') I say unto thee." And now that rude cross becomes the eternal judge's seat; the nails in His pierced hand, keys; the one, a key that releases, "Be of good cheer, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee;" and the other, a key that opens heaven, "*Tomorrow shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*" And as the Jewish day began at sunset, we would say: "this very evening."

Listen, you who weep over your dead, who seek your departed! Where are they? Whither does the Lord depart, and with Him the penitent thief, when the last sigh has welled up from their breasts, and the last struggle is over? "*Tomorrow shalt thou be with me in Paradise!*" We would like to know

more about this: to look farther into that mysterious land which lies beyond the grave. But our Lord knew how unwise and unnecessary this would be, and has but one word in answer to all our questionings: "In Paradise." There He will be, where no thorns grow any more for men, where there is no more sin, neither tears nor death. And He will not be alone there, but—there is a "With Me." Paul writes: "So shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thess. 4: 17)." And is not this much for us to know: the place where those are who sleep in Jesus—a Paradise; and the Paradise where they are—a place where Jesus is with them! And when do they reach it? "Today" says the A. V., and the exact word of our Lord given by the revision says: "Tomorrow," this evening; not after long years of waiting. But when the day of their death ends, freed from all guilt, troubled no longer by any foe, they are with Him in Paradise! Who can listen to this, without praying: "Bring me too, Lord, to Paradise!"

But the answer was not: "Now! Right away!" The thief, with all his penitence, must still go through some long and painful hours. Yet now these are lit up by a cheering beacon: "Saved!" Whether your last way of the cross be short or long, easy or hard, cheered by many a comfort or gloomy, a gentle falling asleep or an anguished struggle—what matters this, if it only ends in your being saved and blessed? That walk through the valley of the shadow is not abolished; there is no detour around it; but it now becomes a walk *with* Him, a way *to* Him in Paradise.

Once more we examine our text: what is needed for a blessed death? Just what our church teaches:

"Repent ye, and believe on the Lord Jesus!" Article Six of the Augsburg Confession closes: "It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ, is *saved*; *freely* receiving remission of sins, *without works* (where would this poor thief be otherwise), *by faith alone.*" But in all this comfortable doctrine let us never forget the holy earnestness of it! That faith is not a dead thing, not a mere: "Lord, remember me" upon our lips, but a power which transforms the very heart of a man, administers a death-blow to that sinful old man within, and begets in his stead a *new man*, the Christ within us! This new man appears even in the dying thief. His *birth* is manifested by the love in which he seeks to save the soul of his blaspheming companion, the unmurmuring patience with which he bears his sufferings, and the good confession he witnesses amid a mocking world. Dear Christians, this is the "one thing needful" for a blessed death: the *giving of our hearts to the Crucified*, for with this goes inseparably: *That Crucified One forever in our hearts!*

Again we turn to our text. *When* may a sinner yet be saved? That "Tomorrow in Paradise" answers plainly: *"In the eleventh hour!"* Even then he may lay hold upon the rescuing hand of God. So, you who judge severely this or that dead man; you who are distressed over those whom no prayers and cares could lead to the Saviour while they lived—perhaps there is more hope for these than you think! It may be that those, whom you pointed to Him in vain while they lived, have found Him in death! Who can tell what thoughts awake in souls in that hour, when all their past life flashes before the dying, illumined by the light of eter-

nity! What memories must be recalled of long despised invitations to accept the grace of God! What secret dialogues, unheard by any man, are carried on between the soul and the Lord, though they consist only in a sighing from the heart's depths: "Lord, remember me!" and the answer, sure to come from on high to such a plea: "Verily, I say unto thee."

Is there any one among us today, whose sins have piled up like mountains above his head, and who despairs and thinks that for him it is, "too late?" No! child of man, cling to your Saviour; though it be with the trembling hand of a dying man! I tell you: "This man receiveth sinners," and it is *not too late!*

But what is written here for the comfort of the despairing, dare not become a pillow for our indifference and carnal security. We must utterly condemn that false comfort, in which the world says: "*The hour of death will be time enough for me to turn.*" Remember, that beside the penitent thief hung another who found no grace, but *remained as he was*, even in his death. And, who of us has any control over the manner and hour of his dying? What if, when it comes, like Esau we "find no space for repentance?" What if we cannot pray, much as we would? If the beginning of death and its end come together, as in some sudden stroke, and we cannot even cry: "Lord help me!" Yes, then we awake on the other side with a fearful? "*Too late!*"

Today then, if ye hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Heb. 3: 7f)." Turn then and be converted today, before that morrow comes when all may be so different.

To this help us, Lord, by Thy holy cross! Teach us that we must die; and teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Ps. 90:12). Remember not our sins, but remember Thy great mercy! (Ps. 25:7)! Remember us in our last hour, bear us safe and blessed through all its anguish and fear, and bring us where with the penitent thief and all the redeemed we may be *with Thee in Paradise!*

"O Paradise, O Paradise,
I greatly long to see
The special place my dearest Lord
In love prepares for me.

Lord Jesus, King of Paradise,
O keep me in Thy love,
And guide me to that happy land
Of perfect rest above."
Amen.

April 11-27.

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